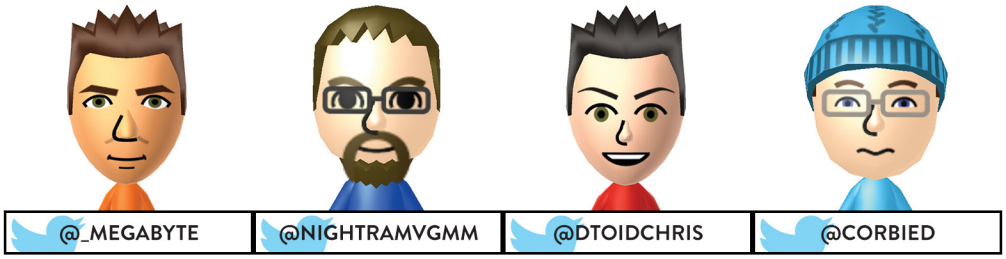
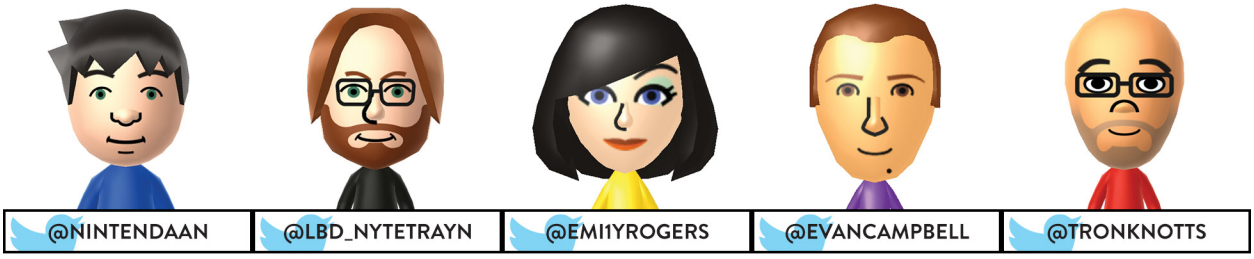
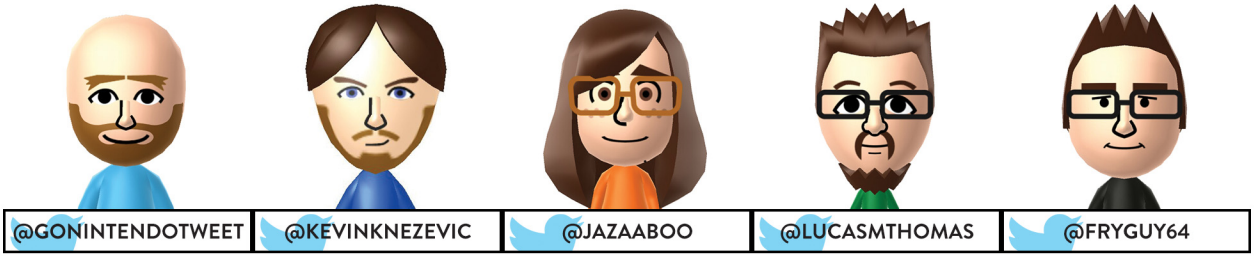
ISSUE #5:
POKÉMON POWER
JOIN THE FORCE OF NINTENDO FANS
NF
THE ABC'S OF POKÉMON X & Y
THEN & NOW: POKÉMON RPGs
INTERVIEW: MANABU YAMANA, PRESIDENT & CEO OF GENIUS SONORITY
CHARACTER PROFILE: MEWTWO
THE (NON-POKÉMON) HISTORY OF GAME FREAK
IT'S NEW TO ME! EARTHBOUND
RAYMAN LEGENDS
PIKMIN 3
THE WONDERFUL 101
KICKSTARTED!
SHANTAE & THE PIRATE'S CURSE
F-ZERO: ODE TO THE X CUP
WHO'S THAT POKÉMON?
SEPTEMBER/ OCTOBER 2013
Pokémon X

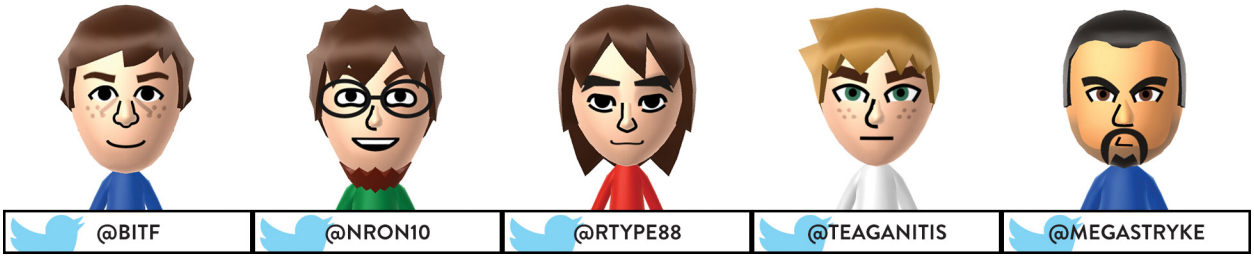
FOLLOW THE FORCE

The members of the Nintendo Force love getting the chance to communicate with you, our readers, through the release of each new issue of NF Magazine. If you'd like to keep closer tabs on what's going on with our lives or hit us up with some direct, individual questions every once in a while, though, Twitter is going to be your best bet for success. Here are the Twitter handles for our entire staff. Find us, follow us and keep on supporting us as the Nintendo Force!









WARNING: FOLLOW AT YOUR OWN RISK. WHILE THE PAGES OF NF MAGAZINE ARE ALWAYS FAMILY FRIENDLY, SOME OF THESE JOKERS HAVE BEEN KNOWN TO GET A LITTLE RISQUÉ WITH THEIR TWEETS. YOU KNOW WHICH ONES.

ISSUE #5:
POKÉMON POWER

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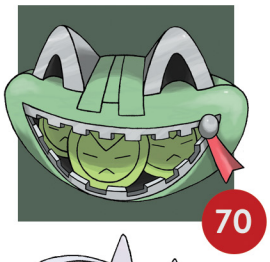
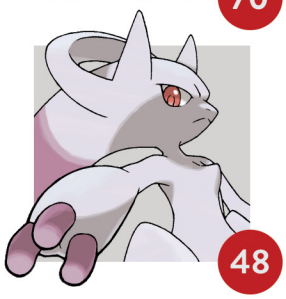
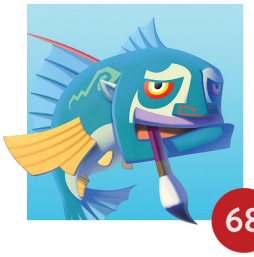
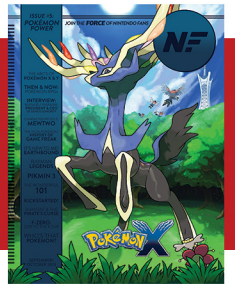








ON THE COVER

The dynamic, dual-sided flippable cover art of this issue lets you declare your allegiance – will you choose Xerneas, or will you leave Yveltal sitting face-up on your coffee table? The superb Sugimori-style art was created by the brilliant Xous54 – see more at:

xous54.deviantart.com

SEPTEMBER/
OCTOBER 2013

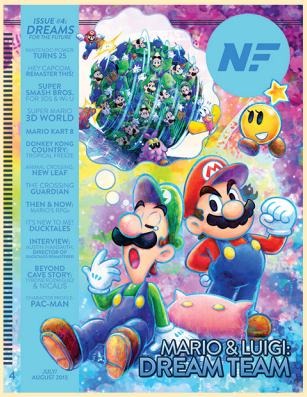
Inbox

The Power of Pokémon

It happens just once every couple of years. Sure, the series is a continuous presence in Nintendo's lists of upcoming releases – there's always some spin-off or another on the schedule. But true, new installments in Pokémon's core RPG series are a rarity – they only come around every few years, and, when they do, it's a time for all Poké-fans to rejoice. We're now poised on the precipice overlooking the arrival of the franchise's sixth generation of games, which would be exciting in and of itself – but Pokémon X and Y are doing much more than just iterating the brand again. They're totally overhauling the games' visual style, bringing in an all-new, 18th type of monster, giving new superpowered evolutions to classic creatures who've been with us since the '90s . . . and much, much more. We've rounded up all of what's new in our central feature for this issue, "The ABC's of Pokémon X & Y." But that's not all! We've packed these pages with a Pokémon focus in every section, from checking in with the latest news for the brand to giving you a full Then & Now history of the games' development since their Generation I. We've got a review of Pokémon Rumble U and a character profile of Mewtwo. We've got a featured interview with Manabu Yamana, the man who first brought Pokémon adventures into 3D on the GameCube nearly a decade ago. And we're even taking a look at the artistic "Fakemon" movement in Community. Not a Poké-fan yourself? There's still plenty in these pages for you too, but, if you don't mind my suggesting it, X and Y look like the best possible entry point for newcomers the series has ever had. So give them a try!

Lucas M. Thomas

LUCAS M. THOMAS, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



ISSUE #4:
JULY/AUGUST 2013

In our last issue, we took a cue from Mario & Luigi: Dream Team's thematic focus to discuss our Dreams for the Future – and one we mentioned, "A New Era for Mega Man," seems like it may be becoming reality already. Check out Page 18 for more on creator Keiji Inafune's unofficial reboot of the series, the new Mighty No. 9!

Letters

Plot Prediction

What can we expect from the story of Pokémon X and Pokémon Y? – **ALEJANDRO PALOMO**

This is just a wild shot in the dark, but our best guess is that it follows the journey of a young boy or girl who gets their very first Pokémon, seeks to catch them all and become the very best (like no one ever was) while fighting off the ruthless machinations of some sort of evil organization that seeks to use Pokémon to achieve their own sinister goals. There may or may not be a tournament involved somewhere in there, too.

Had it for Years

Do you have a Pokémon you've had for a long time? – **JACK BISHOP**

Pokémon Red.

First Things First

What will your team be in Pokémon X and Y? – **PAUL GURMAN**

That's a tough one. I'm still trying to decide on a Starter!

It's a Grind?

Don't get me wrong, I adore the Pokémon series, but do you ever feel like there is a better mechanic than tedious grinding that could be explored? It's almost guaranteed, in a Pokémon game, you will have to grind for a few hours before every Gym. The Pokémon games are more about the journey than destination, but who wants to meander around in circles more than they're actually traveling? Apparently, millions worldwide. I can't help shake the feeling that there is a better way. Any ideas?

Also, how did you feel about the Pokéwalker? – **CURTIS FELTS**

Maybe you're playing the games differently than I am, but I've personally never had to deal with any grind before Gym battles. (Except perhaps when picking Charmander as the Starter way back in Red and Blue, since he was ill-suited to deal with both the Rock and Water Gyms that were up first in that adventure.) Creating a balanced team with a good coverage of Super Effective attacks should be all you need to succeed without having to spend hours grinding for level-ups.

Also, the Pokéwalker was kind of neat, though I wonder if the Nintendo 3DS hardware doesn't make it obsolete.

Poké-Parade!

Why were the interfaces on Black and White such a giant step back from HeartGold and SoulSilver? The touch hotkeys were way more useful than the C-Gear. I'd like to see a customizable bottom screen sort of like a smartphone, where I can place hotkeys, have a live dowsing machine, and chose which online/connectivity options I want. Also, Pokémon need to follow you again. – **ADMAN ABOU-NASR**

From the looks of things, your complaints should be addressed by X and Y. As for Pokémon following you, I'm dying for a Pokémon game that takes a cue from Lunar: The Silver Star and has an entire chain of monsters forming a snake-like parade behind you.

The Nostalgia of Disney + Capcom

I just read through Issue #4 of NF Magazine, and I have to say, it's the best issue yet! My favorite feature was "Hey Capcom: Remaster This!" where the great Disney/Capcom NES and SNES games are discussed. As I read it, I felt as if the Nintendo Force were doing a service to gamers from my generation (late 1980s through the 1990s). Those games were as influential to my childhood as any of the Mario, Zelda, Mega Man, or any of the other great franchises were. It seems by reading the contributions from the Nintendo Force staff, I wasn't alone. While DuckTales rightfully is getting a great deal of buzz with the new remake, I was happy to see games like Darkwing Duck and Disney's Magical Quest Starring Mickey Mouse similarly praised in your article.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention one omission. You failed to bring up the Bonkers game Capcom released for the SNES in 1994. It played very similarly to the Magical Quest series, but possibly got overlooked by gamers due to being released later in the SNES life cycle, and the fact that the Bonkers TV show wasn't nearly as memorable as its predecessors. Nevertheless, I thought the article was awesome and it showed the dedication of Nintendo Force to Nintendo products both old and new. Thanks, and keep up the excellent work! – **SCOTT CHRISTY**

Thanks, Scott! And yes, Bonkers D. Bobcat did end up on the cutting room floor for the feature, but we'd welcome a Remastered version of his SNES adventure too!

Down with 'Chu

Is Pikachu really a worthy mascot of the series? Wouldn't it make more sense if it were a Normal-type like Jigglypuff, Meowth or (in all seriousness) Snorlax? What about a Pokémon that can be any of them, like Ditto? What about an old legendary, like Mew or Mewtwo? I hate that little rat mutant. (Stupid Down B ruining my Down Aerial!) – **SAMUEL WALDON BENNETT**

I agree. Over the years, Pokémon has evolved, and it's time for the series' mascot to evolve with it! Vote Raichu for Pokémon Mascot in Generation VII!

Karp, Karp

A Mega Magikarp would be awesome, and it would prove that it doesn't even have to evolve into Gyarados to become a worthy opponent. Do you agree? – **ANDY CLARKE**

I don't know . . . seems like a Mega Magikarp would be twice as worthless to me. Mega Splash! Mega Flail! Mega Fail.

A Load of Bull

Do you think that when they went back and added new evolutions to old Pokémon they should have included Tauros? – **NICHOLAS PACKARD**

As a Taurus (though not Tauros) myself? Absolutely.

Pokémon Why

Why is Altaria a Dragon-type? And why *isn't* Charizard a Dragon-type? – **ISAAC SOLUM**

Don't rush us; we're still trying to figure out why Clefairy isn't listed as a Fairy-type yet.

Snap into It!

Why has there not been a Pokémon Snap reboot yet? Especially now that the Wii U and 3DS are available. – **JESSICA WITHERS**

Pokémon Snap-chat. Think about it. – **RYAN VANLIERRE**

With all these cameras on everything from the 3DS to the Wii U's GamePads nowadays, you'd think it would be a natural fit!

Go to Console!

Do you think we'll ever get to a point where Game Freak and Nintendo will be comfortable with releasing a main entry of the Pokémon series on consoles? I mean come on, it'd be so cool to have a Pokémon game using all of the Wii U's power. – **ERIC REITZ**

That would be awesome, but you have to ask yourself: Is Nintendo simply saving such a prospect for when they absolutely need something as surefire as that? And if so, do we really want them to wind up in such a position that they'd have no choice but to use it?

Poké-Tactics

What sorts of changes would you like to see made in future games? – **GEORGE SHIRAI**

Personally, I'd love to see the more strategic elements of Pokémon Conquest make their way into the main games somehow. (And Conquest deserves to have a sequel too.)

What about the Humans?

Hi, NF writers and editors! Being a major Pokémon fan, I realize that one of the main appeals of it are the Pokémon themselves. However, I personally really like the human characters in the series too. The Gym Leaders, the rivals, the Champions, that one occasional odd Magikarp salesman . . . I'm not sure if I just don't pay enough attention to the rest of the Poké-fandom, but I feel like the human characters in Pokémon games don't get enough love. What say you guys? Any Pokémon characters that don't breathe fire or throw balls of energy out of their hands that you really like? – **JEFFREY MENDOZA**

Well, we have said Professor Oak, but some disturbing facts about his past have recently come to light. (Flip over to Page 7!)

DON'T ANGER THE OX

Considering we're getting both a Generation I and a Generation VI Starter Pokémon as well as a Torchic in X and Y, what are you going to choose? – **BRIAN ALLEN**

Again with the Starter choices! So . . . many . . . possibilities . . . Error! Error! Force restart!

Okay, I guess I should go ahead and say that the original three starters (and their Mega forms) alone have me conflicted. I love dragons, I love the tank-like turtle form and Grass is my preferred elemental. No matter what I choose, at least two-thirds of me is going to hate myself.

Color Comes to the Miiverse

The most artistic Wii U owners out there have been filling up the Miiverse with incredible black-and-white drawings for months now, but the recent release of the new Art Academy: SketchPad app has given them all the power to add color to their efforts! (Among many other features – check out our review on Page 29.) Here, we're rounding up a few of our early SketchPad-created favorites (and a couple of normal Miiverse drawings, for comparison).

– BASCHTEL

– CASSI ★

– FALCON

– SI

– YAYO

– SI

– BENNY T

– ETHAN

– MARIA

– MOSSA

– SHAGGY

– DODON

– ANDREW GRABOWSKI

– ANDREW GRABOWSKI

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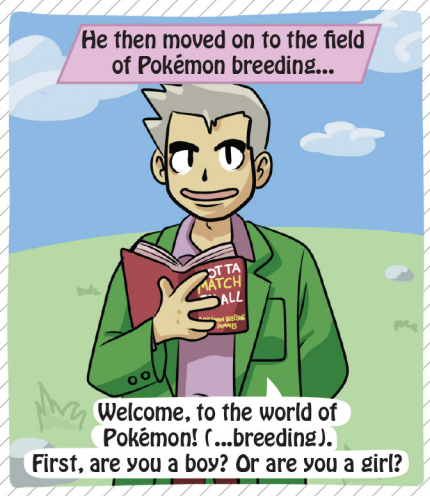
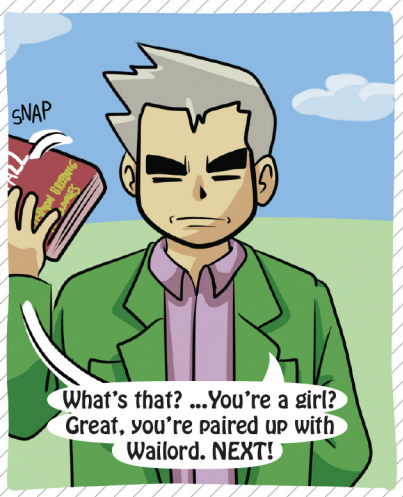
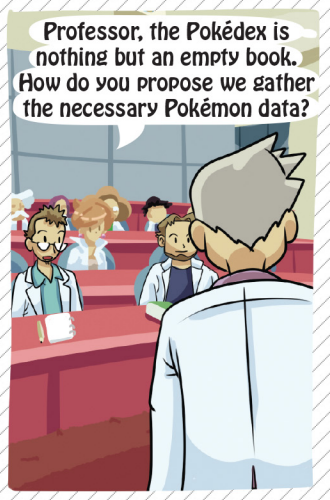
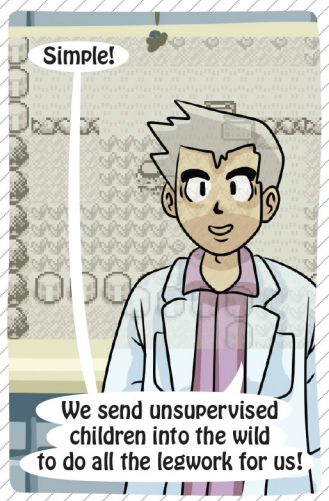
MIGHTY OAK

THE TRUE STORY OF PROFESSOR OAK









The New 3DS, Without 3D

The new Nintendo 2DS cuts the fancy visual effects (and the price of entry).

TO THE SURPRISE and amazement of everyone, Nintendo has announced that they're releasing a new version of the Nintendo 3DS handheld called the Nintendo 2DS. The selling point is that the stereoscopic 3D has been removed, meaning that those who can't enjoy that particular (and slightly costly) functionality no longer have to worry that they're paying good money for something they're unable to appreciate. Because of that component getting the axe, the price of this unit will be $129.99 – a savings of 40 dollars when compared to the current MSRP for normal, non-XL 3DS systems.

Other features of the original Nintendo 3DS to hit the chopping block for this cost-friendly iteration are the stereo speakers (only one remains, though you can still enjoy stereo sound through the use of headphones) and the clamshell-styled folding case. Instead, the wedge-like form more closely resembles one of those tablets which are all the rage these days, and the controls are more centered on the face of the device. This means that the sometimes-problematic hinge of the other versions is a non-issue on the Nintendo 2DS, allowing for a greater sense of stability and durability.

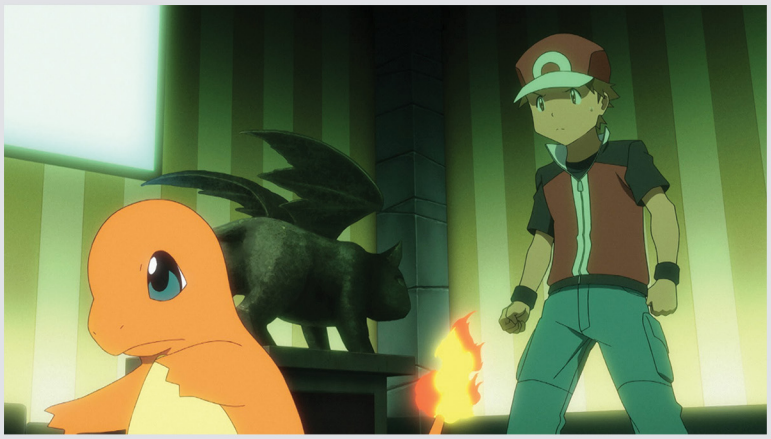
The Nintendo 2DS will go on sale beginning October 12th – the same day as Pokémon X and Y.

Wii U Drops, Too

Fifty dollars falls off the asking price for Nintendo's home console (and a Zelda bundle sails into view).

STARTING SEPTEMBER 20TH, the Wii U Deluxe Set with drop its price from $349.99 to $299.99. To help celebrate the event, Nintendo is offering a new Wii Deluxe bundle that comes with a Zelda-themed GamePad, a download code for The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD and a digital copy of the Zelda series history book, Hyrule Historia. (It's a little sad that you won't get physical copies of the book and the game, but I guess Nintendo had to cut costs somewhere.)

If you've already had a Wii U for a while and the price drop news is a bit upsetting, remember that you've had the opportunity to download a lot of great Virtual Console games for just 30 cents, so that probably saved you some money. No word on if Nintendo will continue to offer the Wii U Basic Set yet, so if you were one of the few to pick one up, you may have a collector's item on your hands. Regardless, we can only hope that this move helps the Wii U to pick up some steam. The more consoles out in the wild, the more likely we are to get some great Wii U games in the future!



Back to the Beginning

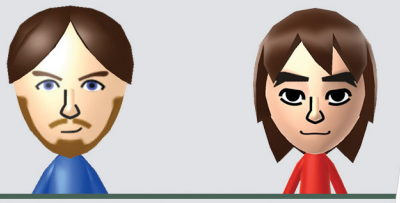
Ash gets the axe in the all-new anime special, Pokémon: The Origin.

THOSE WHO'VE LONG since outgrown the animated escapades of Ash Ketchum (Pokémon's perpetually pre-pubescent protagonist – try saying that ten times fast!) may be interested to hear that a new feature-length TV adventure is in the pipeline that draws closer inspiration from the original games. "Pocket Monsters: The Origin" stars canon hero Red (the eponymous player character of the original Generation One Pokémon games on Game Boy) on his quest to conquer the Pokémon League, battling the Kanto region's eight gym leaders and overcoming his rival, Green.

The feature boasts an art style that hews a bit closer to that of Ken Sugimori's original character art than its long-running anime counterpart, and seems to be targeted towards a slightly older audience than Ash's adventures. Of what little information is available, we know Red's canon starter selection is Charmander, while Green's is Squirtle (sorry Bulbasaur, looks like they'll be leafing you behind), but any other Pokémon captured by the pair remain to be seen.

The TV special is scheduled to air in Japan on October 2nd, although Nintendo's tight-lipped on any plans for English localization at this time. This feature is an exciting prospect for long-time Pokémon fans nonetheless, however, and one can only hope will lead to further Pokémon game adaptations in the future – a gritty crime drama based around Pokémon Snap, for example.

"It's pretty interesting to see a Pokémon feature that doesn't prominently feature Pikachu in all its promotional material! Don't worry, I still love you, you adorable little yellow vermin."– **ROBERT**



Pokémon + Tekken?

Trademarks and teasers point to a potential new fighting game featuring the 'mons.

AT A RECENT Pokémon event in Japan, Nintendo rolled out a new retrospective video that touched on nearly every major game in the series. (They even spent some time on Trading Card Game.) The video seemed to end on Pokémon X and Y, which was expected, but then segued into a surprise – two Fighting-type Pokémon, Blaziken and Lucario, were shown facing off in what looked like a city street, complete with modern cars, a Pokémon flag in the background and what looked like a highly detailed, HD graphics engine. Nintendo has denied comment on what it all means, though it's clear they're up to something. Potentially a Pokémon fighting game? Also providing a clue is the fact that The Pokemon Company has recently registered the names Pokkén Fighters and Pokkén Tournament as trademarks in the US – chances are we'll get a real announcement soon.

It's a sure thing that any Pokémon game would help the Wii U to sell better than it is now, but if Nintendo wants to make the most of this, they'd do well to make something more on the scale of Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness and less like Pokémon: Battle Revolution (more on those games in our interview with Genius Sonority's Manabu Yamana, beginning on Page 54). Either that, or they've got to make this a fighting game as detailed and deep as Super Smash Bros. (Though it can't be too much like Smash Bros., or else Nintendo will end up competing with themselves.)

It's not easy being Nintendo. If you're not good enough, people complain. If you're too good, but too similar to your other games, then other games suffer next to your greatness.

"The only thing that could help the Wii U to sell better than a Pokémon Fighting game is a Pokémon vs. My Little Pony vs. Adventure Time vs. Grand Theft Auto game. Make it happen, Nintendo!"– **JONATHAN**

"Even though we don't know how much the service will cost yet, I'm really excited to use Pokémon Bank. It sounds like a convenient way to transfer all of my favorite monsters to Pokémon X, and I like that it'll be compatible with future titles. Sign me up!"
– **KEVIN K.**

Better than Bill's PC

For a yearly withdrawal of cash, you can now securely deposit your Pokémon.

IF YOU'VE EVER wanted an easier way to transfer your Pokémon between games, you're in luck – during a recent Nintendo Direct broadcast, Pokémon director Junichi Masuda announced Pokémon Bank, a special cloud service for Pokémon X and Y that will allow trainers to store up to 3,000 of their Pocket Monsters in online boxes. It will also work in conjunction with the Poké Transporter, a 3DS app that lets players transfer any critters from Pokémon Black, White, Black 2 and White 2 to their Bank accounts. There will be a small annual fee to use Pokémon Bank, but Nintendo has said it will be offering fans a free trial of the service when it first launches.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

GOTTA BUY 'EM ALL

Toy monsters come to life in Pokémon Rumble U.

POKÉMON RUMBLE U has arrived, and a set of collectible figurines that interact with the game is now in stores and available for purchase. Typically these Toy Pokémon are sold for around $4, and each is sold in a little Poké Ball package – though, due to that blind packaging, you never know just which character you're about to buy.

The "random encounters" of each purchase are meant to put emphasis on trading in the real world – and only the toys bought physically in stores can be upgraded in the game, so it's worth your time to try to snag a few if you're also planning to download Rumble U from the Wii U eShop. The figures use NFC technology (Near-Field Communication), and instead of having a Skylanders-like portal, they're simply placed directly on the Wii U GamePad – its built-in NFC reader then registers which creature you've placed there.

It's easy to see the potential of this Wii U-exclusive ability quite clearly. The figures themselves are polygonal representations of the famous Pokémon we all know and love, and mirror their distinctive toy-like looks in Rumble U. There are 18 figures in the first series, and as they are designated on each figure, we can probably expect more series after this. If the game takes off and proves to be as popular as previous entries in the series, the amount of figures it could produce is staggering.

People are quick to compare these Rumble U figures to those from Disney Infinity or the Skylanders series, but these figures aren't required to play the game, they cost much less and they have an element of surprise due to the blind packaging (though they could have been better if the characters could leave their pedestals, be wound up and fight in the physical world as well as the virtual one).

A PLUSHIE EXPLOSION!

More Marios, Luigis and Pokémon than you could ever cuddle with.

NINTENDO-LICENSED TOY companies usually have a ton of plushes arrive in November for the holiday season, but this year may have the largest flood of cuddly Nintendo memorabilia to date. Banpresto has announced that they will be making plushes of the starter Pokémon from Pokémon X & Y, while San-ei has been much busier. A full line of nine Animal Crossing: New Leaf plushes have been announced, including an adorable DJ K.K. plush complete with turntables. Kirby plushes with swappable hats and accessories (like Mike, Sword, Bomb, Whip and more) are also coming, but that's just the beginning! For the Mario line, each of the seven Koopalings will be plushified, as well as enemies Banzai Bill, Porcupuffer, Monty Mole, Spike, Fuzzy, Buzzy Beetle, Pokey and Mecha Koopa. (Many of these have never had plush releases before.) Straps of Shy Guy, Thwomp, Bullet Bill and a Blooper have also been announced, as well as obligatory plushes of Mario and Yoshi. You think that's enough? I hope not, because a set of Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon plushes was also announced, including a Polterpup plush! Happy Holidays! Sad Wallets!

SCROOGE'S GOLD

Capcom celebrates the release of DuckTales: Remastered with serious style.

CAPCOM LOVES TO go retro to promote its games – they did it with Mega Man 9, and now they're doing it with DuckTales. This virtually impossible-to-attain tin lunchbox has one of the best prizes inside a gamer could want: a golden NES cartridge featuring the new art of DuckTales: Remastered. There are other things included too, like a gag coupon for green moon cheese, a numbered certificate of authenticity and a flier advertising "upcoming" games from Capcom, like Mega Man 3. But does the cart work? Absolutely! (It plays the original DuckTales.)

iam8bit, the game-themed art gallery in Los Angeles, was commissioned to build the carts, which are refurbished and hand-painted vintage NES cartridges that have all-new guts. Only 150 were made, though, making this instantly one of the rarest and most desirable NES collectibles ever. Good luck in getting one if you decide to try!

For more cool collectibles and information on how to order from import shops, visit The Video Game Memorabilia Museum at http://www.videogamemm.com

X & Y 3DS XLs

That's an alphabetical mouthful.

THERE ARE NEW Pokémon games coming – you may have heard of them. (They have to do with some letters or something.) Well, Nintendo's releasing not one but two special edition 3DS XLs that look absolutely fantastic. There are red and blue versions, both the same design feature the legendary Pokémon Xerneas and Yveltal. (And though you might think it'd be a perfect match, these don't come with the games installed, as they'll go on sale a few weeks before X and Y hit shelves.) The red version is exclusive to North America, but the blue version does appear in Japan. (Japan also gets a gold version that you should check out if you're a fan of being jealous.) The systems will be released by the time you read this issue, for $199.99 each. These have a good chance of selling out quickly, so plan ahead!

Even More Mega Merch

He may not be getting any new games right now, but Mega Man is showing up just about everywhere else.

THE SAN DIEGO Comic Con and PAX Prime both brought great opportunities for swag hunters. Capcom was giving out and selling quite a few items, including several 25th Anniversary Mega Man items: A metal classic pixelated Mega Man keychain, an inflatable Mega Buster, the 25th Anniversary Mega Man and Mega Man X commemorative statue, a 3DS case and even the MM25: Mega Man & Mega Man X Official Complete Works Limited Edition hardcover book from Udon were on sale. (Many of these are available at the Capcom Store online, but the keychain and the inflatable were exclusive to SDCC, where they were also handing out Mega Man 25th Anniversary pins and Capcom 30th Anniversary pins.) All of these commemorative items are great and designed to evoke strong nostalgia, but I know the fans would trade it all in for a new game!

Treasure Trove of Tomes

The ultimate box set of Zelda books. (And the ultimate box.)

OVER THE PAST several years, Prima Games has released four hardcover collector's edition Zelda strategy guides. (Each one is now hard to come by.) But this November, a box set containing updated versions of these four guides, along with two new ones, will go on sale in a commemorative treasure chest container! Each book sold for around $40 on its own before, but this whole set is available for pre-order at Amazon for just over $100!

New Stages, Old Fighters

Playing it safe with expected announcements.

SUPER SMASH BROS. UPDATE

WHEN SUPER SMASH Bros. Brawl was in development, Nintendo fan hype hit unheard-of heights – thanks in large part to director Masahiro Sakurai's regular blog updates to the Super Smash Bros. Dojo website. Each weekday brought some new tidbit of info, or some shocking reveal – like clockwork, every morning, there was always something new to learn about Brawl.

Things aren't quite so hyper with the new Super Smash Bros. games that are in development now. Though Mr. Sakurai is putting out daily updates once again, they're often simply single screenshots containing characters and stages we've already seen before – few days bring true new information, it seems.

That's not to say that there's nothing new, though. Since our last issue went out the door, we've learned a few new things, gotten a couple of character confirmations and been given a glimpse of a few new stages.

First up, the Man in Green. Coming as a surprise to no one, Luigi has been confirmed to be returning to the playable roster one more time. (The Nintendo Direct video announcing this bit of news awkwardly made it out to be a megaton bit of info, to which the Internet collectively replied, "Luigi's in it? No duh, Nintendo.")

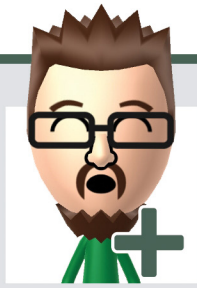
Perhaps a bit surprising is that he seems to be mostly unaltered from previous games – since he's had so much individual focus here in the Year of Luigi and starred in games with strong thematic elements that could have been drawn upon to enhance his character (Luigi's Mansion: Dark Moon, Mario & Luigi: Dream Team), it does seem a little odd that he's looking like the same old Weegee.

And speaking of sameness, Peach is back as well. HD suits her, but on the gameplay front she's once again a parasol-wielding, turnip-tossing terror. (Not that anyone would want Peach's moveset changed. Except to take Toad out, to give him the chance to become a fighter on his own.)

Truly new? The stages, which actually are things we've never seen before – the Wii U Smash will include arenas based on Metroid: Other M's Pyrosphere (site of a climactic battle with Ridley in that game), and a tour of the history of the Pilotwings franchise as characters battle on top of planes flying around Wuhu Island (among other destinations from that series).

Will we get some more exciting news for next time? Well, that's all up to Mr. Sakurai.

"If you read my Smash preview in our last issue, you know I'd hoped for a true return of the Dojo glory days. Seems like that's not in the cards this time." – **LUCAS**



Yeah!
The 2DS will be perfect for younger gamers ...

Unyeah...
... though it's shaped like a wedge of cake.

PREPARE YOUR WALLET

Release dates confirmed through the rest of the year.

AMONG OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS, Nintendo recently revealed when we can expect to see a number of hotly-anticipated Wii U and Nintendo 3DS titles hit shelves for the holiday season.

The headliners for the Wii U are Super Mario 3D World and Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze, who swapped release dates. Mario and company will be bouncing in on November 22nd, while the DK Crew is now looking at a December 6th release. Wii Party U will precede them both on October 25th, while Wii Fit U will follow them all to retail on December 13th (though you'll be able to download it as early as November 1st). The original Wii Sports games are all coming back as HD-remake downloads beginning in November, and Mario & Sonic at the Sochi 2014 Olympic Winter Games is also on track for the holidays, though no specific date has been locked down for it as of this writing.

Over on Nintendo 3DS (or if you prefer, Nintendo 2DS as well), it's going to be a November to remember as both The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds and the newly christened Mario Party: Island Tour will both be arriving on November 22nd.

Third parties are getting in on the action, too. Scribblenauts Unmasked, Skylanders: Swap Force and Sonic Lost World each hit both the 3DS and Wii U on September 24th, October 13th and October 22nd, respectively. Other Wii U titles to watch out for include Just Dance 2014 on October 8th, Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag on October 29th, Call of Duty: Ghosts on November 5th and Watch Dogs on November 19th. On 3DS, Batman: Arkham Origins Blackgate arrives October 25th, while Adventure Time: Explore the Dungeon Because I DON'T KNOW! will be available November 19th.

"With so many great-looking games and so little time, where do you even begin? And with three big titles all arriving on November 22nd, we're left to wonder if there could be an accompanying Club Nintendo special promotion in the works for buying the entire trinity. Hmm . . ."
– DAVID

DOWNLOAD

Nintendo's eShops are about to get a new wave of indie content. These games might not have made it, though, if they hadn't been ...

KICKSTARTED!

A Hat in Time

An ode to the N64's 3D collect-a-thons.

REMEMBER THAT MAGIC you once felt when playing those great 3D collect-a-thon platformers like Super Mario 64 and Banjo-Kazooie? A Hat in Time is trying to recapture that feeling for you – and doing so with gorgeous cel-shaded graphics and a child protagonist that will also instantly remind you of The Wind Waker.

And, on top of all that nostalgia, famed Rareware composer Grant Kirkhope will be creating multiple tunes for the game. (He's the one who gave Banjo-Kazooie its signature sound, ensuring the audio here will be just as evocative of yesteryear as the gameplay and graphics are.)

I asked Jonas Kaerlev, lead game designer of Gears For Breakfast, about why their Kickstarter campaign was such a success.

"I think our success had to do with the fact that we were able to show that we are capable of creating a game even without a budget; not just concept art or a test room, but something that would realistically reflect the final product. I highly recommend anyone who considers a Kickstarter for game development to create a promising prototype as an absolute minimum!"

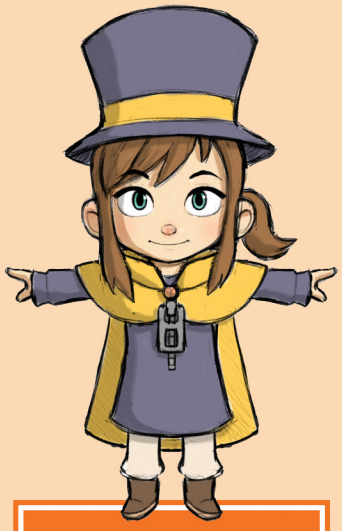
Kaerlev says Nintendo has been very supportive, but the biggest obstacle is that their current UDK license doesn't support Wii U – something they are speaking to Epic Games about at the moment. Kaerlev was also nice enough to give us an update on the game's status.

"Considering that we now have a total of seven chapters of the game to complete, I'd say the prototype was about 5% of the complete game. I reckon we'll be about 40% done by the first of December! We are hoping to be content-complete with all of the chapters in Summer 2014, but with all the additional content [to be added from successfully hitting stretch goals on] Kickstarter, we'll have to see how far we are by then!"

The Gears for Breakfast team believes that the overwhelming support from Kickstarter backers will help this game reach its full potential.

"The Kickstarter funding allows us to add more and larger areas, more detail as well as more enemies and NPCs! We're incredibly thankful for all the support we've gotten through Kickstarter, and we hope everyone who has supported us will like the final product they helped create!"

With the magic of Mario, Banjo and Zelda as key influences, A Hat in Time seems like a perfect fit for a Nintendo console. We'll keep our fingers crossed for a Wii U version! – **EMILY**



GOAL
$30,000
PLEDGED
$296,360
BACKERS
9,169

Super Ubie Land

Just don't call him "Ubi."

THIS PAST FEBRUARY, Notion Games launched a Kickstarter for their 2D platformer, Super Ubi Land. (It's since undergone a slight name change, thanks to Ubisoft.) Regardless of whether this little balloon-holding hero has an "e" attached to the end of his name or not, though, enough backers pledged their support that Notion surpassed their initial goal of $5,000. That funded the game's PC version, and those who pledged $20 or more will receive an eShop code for the Wii U version once it's released. I asked Andrew Augustin, the founder of Notion Games, about the status of the Wii U version.

"We have officially finished the PC, Mac and Linux versions of the game. We still have a lot of work to do porting to the Wii U, PlayStation 4 and Vita," Augustin said.

"We were mainly worried about completing the PC version of the game so that we can do a smooth port over to the consoles. From there, we can go in and add extra content like levels and costumes exclusive to different platforms."

The developer asks for everyone's patience to ensure that the Wii U version is a solid, quality, bug-free port. The soonest we can expect the game to hit consoles is 2014.

"We're aiming to have the Wii U version of Super Ubie Land completed by Q1 2014. I'm trying to ensure that we tweak and improve the game until we feel that it's really solid. Super Ubie Land will release when it's ready – we're trying not to rush the process and make sure that the game plays smoothly with the least amount of bugs as possible."

Super Ubie Land didn't have an enormous funding goal like so many other Kickstarter video game campaigns. Regardless, the developer believes networking, promotion, communication and attractive rewards are the most important elements of a Kickstarter campaign, no matter the size of your goal.

"Super Ubie Land's Kickstarter had a very modest goal. We also had a game that was more than halfway complete, and we were able to show off tons of screenshots, gameplay videos and more. Even though we had a low goal to reach, it still took a ton of work and promotion to achieve that goal. Being popular and having a good name/brand will do wonders for your campaign alone. Otherwise, networking is key to success. The more outlets/people you have to repost and share your campaign, the higher the chances of you reaching success. You also have to have rewards that feel worthwhile to the backers."

If porting to consoles goes smoothly, we can expect Ubie's spaceship to crash-land on the Wii U sometime next year. – **EMILY**

GOAL
$5,000
PLEDGED
$6,333
BACKERS
261

GOAL
$78,715
PLEDGED
$90,118
BACKERS
1,305

Diamond Trust of London

Actually, not a "Download" at all.

"IT'S PRETTY DOUBTFUL there will ever be another Kickstarter success for a DS game," said Jason Rohrer, creator of Diamond Trust of London, over the phone.

I'd say the chances are slim too. While downloadable games give more power and flexibility to developers, Rohrer stuck with his original plan for Diamond Trust of London, a turn-based strategy game about diamond traders. Publisher Majesco approached him about creating a DS game, and after noticing the huge popularity of the platform, he took the plunge in developing his first Nintendo game. But Majesco got cold feet deep into development, which left Rohrer with few options. He didn't want to go the DSiWare route because the install base was dramatically smaller. Plus, his game – which features music by Tom Bailey – fills the largest available cartridge size.

So in comes Zoo Publishing, under the indiePub moniker, which assisted Rohrer in finally making his game a reality. But it was by no means easy. Rohrer launched and oversaw a huge Kickstarter campaign while navigating the obstacle-filled waters of publishing a Nintendo game. As such, Rohrer says the game "stands as a crazy triumph in the face of Nintendo [because of its rules and regulations]." And holding the physical copy just feels so good. – **EVAN**

GOAL
$4,092
PLEDGED
$4,607
BACKERS
158

Orion's Odyssey

If at first you don't succeed . . .

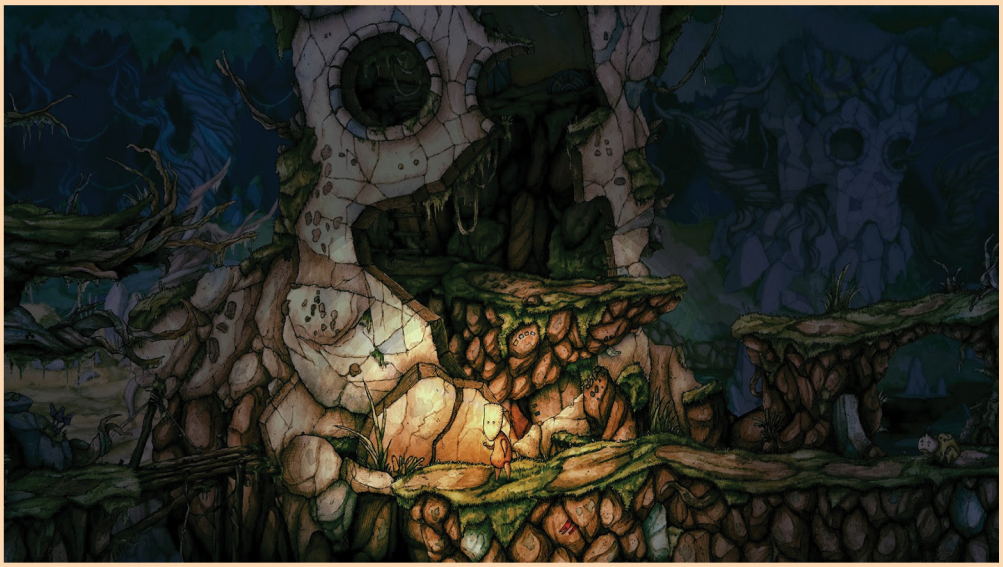
ORIGINALLY PLANNED FOR a full retail release, the tangram-building puzzle game Orion's Odyssey fell short of its first Kickstarter goal – but the team at the New Jersey-based Island Officials wasn't discouraged. They relaunched their campaign with a digital focus, and when that succeeded, they were ecstatic. I talked with CEO Ryan Morrison, who said, "Being funded is much more than a validation of our efforts, it's also an extreme honor and privilege."

Kickstarter has many different challenges and risks that face teams even after they are funded, though. There was some difficulty involved with creating rewards, as Island Officials needed to make sure that they didn't drive the cost too high, but also added value to contributors. They worked it out in the end, and are now in process of developing those rewards.

Kickstarter helps with marketing and other resources, which Ryan and his team have used before. While there may be an added pressure to deliver because there are so many excited backers, the team has used that as fuel to complete the hard work necessary to deliver the game. Ryan and his team have advice for those wanting to start a project on Kickstarter: "First, launching a Kickstarter project requires at least two months of planning in advance. You need to factor in not just the cost of development, but your backer rewards, shipping costs and taxes. Second, be sure to market and make people aware of your Kickstarter before you actually launch. The Kickstarter projects that succeed the most are the ones that achieve a good chunk of their goal toward the beginning of the project." – **BRETT**

Candle

Shine a light!



CANDLE IS CREATED in the spirit of classic cinematic adventures like Out of this World and Flashback. During my discussion with Teku Studios, they compared the gameplay mechanics to Abe's Oddysee and Abe's Exoddus from the Oddworld series. You play as a character carrying a candle that can be lit at certain spots, and you must prevent the flame from being extinguished. Players can use the candle to solve puzzles, find clues and uncover secrets throughout the game.

By the end of its Kickstarter campaign, Candle surpassed its initial $40,000 goal with a total of $52,359. Lead programmer Mike Vallès believes the game's visual style helps differentiate it from anything else on the market.

"Well, we're still surprised by our success on Kickstarter. But we think that Candle's handmade art style is what made our game so interesting to our backers."

The good news is Candle successfully reached its initial funding goal. The bad news: It was unable to hit its Wii U stretch goal.

Thankfully, the bad news isn't all that bad. According to the developer, the Wii U version is still coming.

"Fortunately, the Wii U version is safe. Here's the deal: we planned that stretch goal to hire some extra people that could help us with boosting development, since our idea was to launch every version simultaneously. We always wanted to bring Candle to Wii U (in fact, we already have the devkits at the studio!), so the game will be on the eShop regardless. But since we do not have enough funding for a simultaneous development, it will come out some time after the PC, Mac & Linux versions. We're not doing any kind of direct port – instead we're developing exclusive features for Wii U and its GamePad, and that means more work and time for the team. Also, we're developing the main version of Candle on PC under DirectX, so we also need extra time to adapt our custom shaders to Wii U's environment," Vallès said.

Teku Studios believes the GamePad's touch screen provides an intuitive interface for navigating menus, managing inventory, and playing splash-screen mini-games. The developer is also considering ideas such as blowing into the microphone to extinguish the flame from your character's candle.

I asked Vallès if he had any advice for developers interested in using Kickstarter.

"Running a crowdfunding campaign is a very tough and time-consuming task, so the first thing that we want to make clear is that *Kickstarter is your new job.* You need to focus on the campaign and its progress (updates, interviews, press releases). Every day counts, and sometimes the pledge pace can be slowed down – you don't want that to happen. So be ready to post tons of updates, new content, talk to the community . . . also, you may go there with your game already up and running as well. Showing a functional prototype will grant instant backers to a new project, so that will help you boost your funding progress the first week."

Candle has been in development for more than a year, and the campaign's great success is having Teku consider delaying the original release date by a few weeks to improve the game's quality. The team says we can expect Candle to light up the Wii U eShop in Q1 2014. – **EMILY**

GOAL
$40,000
PLEDGED
$52,359
BACKERS
1,653

Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams

And isn't it ironic, don't you think?

THOUGH THEIR LATEST sequel may not have started out bound for Nintendo systems, the Giana Sisters' infamous history with the Big N makes it seem somehow fitting to see their series return – in a way – to its roots.

"The first Giana Sisters game, The Great Giana Sisters, was a clone of Super Mario Bros., by name and by gameplay," said Adrian Goersch, managing director of Black Forest Games, the German-based developer behind Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams.

The sisters seem to have buried the hatchet with the Bros., though, so Twisted Dreams – after some Kickstarted funding – is out now on Wii U.

"If there is one console manufacturer you have in mind when thinking about challenging platformer games, it is Nintendo," Goersch said. "Our IP has reached a new level. Innovation combined with a strong focus on classic core gameplay in a beautiful, mind-blowing setting and an amazing soundtrack. So it was just the right time for Giana to eventually come home and be released on the Nintendo console, Wii U."

The eShop title lets players switch between cute and punk versions of Giana, as well as alter the world around her with a button press (the music and enemies change too!), and Black Forest Games uses this concept to devise platforming puzzles based around tricky timing. Giana – who's trying to save her sister Maria from a dragon – rocks different abilities in each form, with different ways to dispose of enemies. Twist all of this together in a colorful 2.5D world, and Wii U has another promising indie title.

But the title didn't begin on Wii U. Though originally pitched on Kickstarter for PC, Goersch said the team was in contact with Nintendo.

"Nintendo still is very selective, trying to keep the quality levels for games on their platform as high as possible," Goersch said. "We always had in mind bringing Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams to as many platforms as possible, and we started talking to the Big N quite early."

Out of all the games featured here in our Kickstarted! article, Giana Sisters: Twisted Dreams is the first to have gone on sale – and sales on Wii U have been strong out of the gate.

"In Europe, sales were on the same level as on XBLA and PSN, where it was in the Europe-wide top five," Goersch said. "In North America, they are even slightly stronger in the first days, which is quite interesting."

Goersch thanked fans for the support and said that not only does Black Forest Games believe in Nintendo, but also that "Wii U is part of our plans for the future." – **EVAN**

GOAL
$150,000
PLEDGED
$186,158
BACKERS
6,149

GOAL
$6,000
PLEDGED
$1,158
BACKERS
38

Cosmic Highway

What happens when a Kickstarter campaign falls short of its goal?

SO FAR WE'VE only shown you campaigns that have successfully surpassed their initial goals. Cosmic Highway – a futuristic racing game that incorporates music into its gameplay – presents an example of an unsuccessful Kickstarter campaign. Monty Goulet, the founder of Maestro Interactive Games, was willing to share his team's learning experiences and future plans of going forward with the game's development.

"While we were a little disappointed that our Kickstarter was not funded, it certainly has not hindered development or our spirits. Our reasoning behind making the Kickstarter was to build awareness of our concept as well as get the funds needed to purchase testing units, as we already had the development kits. We managed to secure the funds on our own for the testing units through sales of our previous titles. While it would have been nice to get the funding for Cosmic Highway via Kickstarter and provide fans with all of the neat backer rewards, it certainly has not caused development to cease."

Goulet says that the delay provides the studio with new opportunities for the game.

"The delay has also allowed us to create the title as a multi-console title. It will most likely appear on all three next-gen consoles (and for sure be on two of them), with exclusive content on the Wii U to support the fans that wanted the game originally. We truly think the Wii U GamePad is a great device for this game, and we already have ideas for the exclusive content. We promise you will not be disappointed if you get this title for the Wii U. Overall, the game is coming along rather nicely, and we could not be happier with it."

Goulet reassured me that the game is pretty far along, and we should hear more news about its status in the future. In the mean time, Maestro's next game is called Percy's Predicament – read more about it on Page 19. – **EMILY**

GOAL
$75,000
PLEDGED
$311,502
BACKERS
14,749

Shovel Knight

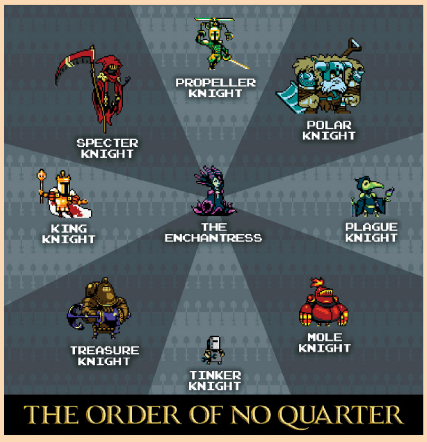
A progress report from our favorite Yacht Club.

WHEN SHOVEL KNIGHT first graced these pages, the title was in the midst of a Kickstarter campaign that ended up blowing away Yacht Club Games' initial funding goal. In fact, fans spoke so loudly – with their dollars – that the eShop game reached every one of its many stretch goals. That's right – not only will Wii U and 3DS owners see what looks like a fantastic 8-bit throwback to the NES era, but the game also promises three playable boss knights, a four-player battle arena, Gender Swap and a Challenge mode. What began as a simple but creative action-adventure game just got packed full of that much more content.

But that's not all. Dig this – Yacht Club Games has revealed the eight-villain roster of The Order of No Quarter, which stands between Shovel Knight and the end boss, The Enchantress. Along with early reveals like Mole Knight and Tinker Knight (my favorite), the studio pulled back the curtain on Specter Knight and Treasure Knight. The former brandishes a grim scythe while the latter dons a heavy-looking diving suit and handles a retractable anchor cannon. (Sounds like some dirty weaponry to me.)

Recently, Shovel Knight showed up at PAX Prime, thanks to Nintendo. The company hosted Yacht Club Games at its booth during the annual gaming convention in August, giving fans the latest scoop on the title. The Wii U demo featured Off-TV Play on the GamePad and an updated user interface with a new emphasis on loot collecting, which gave people a bit of a Dark Souls vibe.

Now, the waiting game begins as Shovel Knight heads down the final stretch of development. Though a release date still hasn't been unearthed, Yacht Club says to expect the title this Winter. – **EVAN**



Mighty No. 9

The (unofficial) return of Mega Man!

DURING PAX PRIME 2013, former Capcom producer Keiji Inafune apologized to a packed room for being unable to realize his dream of a Mega Man project collaboration with fans. But though the Mega Man IP is no longer in his control, that dream lives on in Mighty No. 9, a spiritual successor that promises to evolve classic jump-and-shoot platforming for a new generation.

Fans were just as shocked by the game announcement as they were by the news that it would be funded through Kickstarter. Even though Kickstarter has become a popular avenue for Western indie developers, you can count on one hand the number of Japanese devs who have used its services. Inafune definitely has a lot of faith in the Blue Bomber fandom, who are more than eager to prove that, even if the names change, the spirit will never die.

Leading the charge is a development team stacked with Mega Man alumni. Cooperating alongside Inafune's company Comcept is Inti Creates, best known for the Mega Man Zero and ZX series, as well as Mega Man 9 and 10. On game design is Naoya Tomita, who constructed levels in Mega Man 1 and 2. The art director is Shinsuke Komaki, the main illustrator on the Battle Network and Star Force series. Then there's composer Manami Matsumae, responsible for the music in the NES original. Beyond that are other notable Capcom veterans, including character designer Takenori Kimoto and former head of Capcom localization, Ben Judd.

Further parallels to Mega Man are quite apparent. Mighty No. 9 is the story of Beck, a plucky blue robot and ninth in a line of advanced Mighty Numbers. Unfortunately, a virus causes Beck's predecessors, as well as many other robots on the planet, to go on a rampage. With the help of his female partner, Call, Beck must traverse a multitude of side-scrolling levels, defeat the Mighty Numbers and acquire their unique abilities.

Where Mighty No. 9 stands apart from Mega Man is that Beck's acquired powers cause his entire body to transform – his arm could become a grappling hook, or his feet could morph into tank treads to cross spiky terrain. Even common enemies relinquish Mighty Skills, such as a double jump or a screen-clearing super attack.

The most significant difference is the deep level of fan involvement. In addition to helping fund the project, backers also get to contribute to the game's production by voting on design polls – by meeting certain pledge tiers, they can have enemies they created or even their likenesses incorporated into the game. And since there's no parent company with final authority, we won't have to fear another Mega Man Legends 3 cancellation scenario.

The response to Mighty No. 9 has been overwhelmingly positive. In just over 24 hours, the campaign met its $900,000 goal, and its stretch goal of $2,200,000 guaranteed ports to the Wii U eShop, PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade. The Kickstarter is still running as of this writing, but it's apparent that it will end well.

Mega Man's fate may be uncertain, but thanks to Mighty No. 9, the future just got brighter. – **TONY**

TO BE CONTINUED!

The crowdfunding resources of Kickstarter are fueling the development of more and more games bound for Nintendo systems every day – those featured in this article are only a few of the dozens that have been actively seeking fan support in the past year. So, we're not stopping here! "Kickstarted!" will return in future issues as a recurring feature, as we continue to put the spotlight on unique and interesting Nintendo-bound games that are appealing to the masses for financial assistance. Have a particular Kickstarter project you think should be featured in our pages? Let us know!

Super Penguin Ball

Percy's Predicament proves plastic spheres aren't only meant for rolling monkeys.

WITH ITS GREAT deal of inspiration taken from games such as Super Monkey Ball and Marble Madness, long-time Nintendo fans with fond memories of those ball-rolling adventures may want to keep an eye on the new Wii U eShop title, Percy's Predicament. In the game, Percy the Penguin finds himself captured inside of a magical orb – and if he wants to escape his spherical prison, he'll have to roll himself around obstacles and find the golden fish scattered throughout each level in his puzzling world (and all before time runs out, of course).

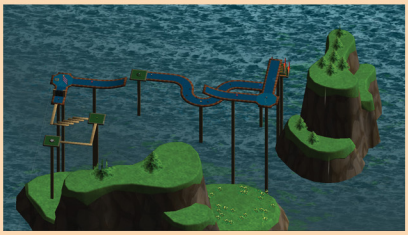
According to the developers at Maestro Interactive Games, the Predicament will feature over 80 levels at launch and 20 additional levels made available as DLC shortly afterward. Maestro's also promising 50 new levels every three months after that, for a total of 250 levels by Fall 2014. (That's a lot of penguin rolling.)

All of these updates will be free for early adopters, which means that if you buy the game at launch, you'll never pay more than the initial price to receive new content. (In other words, the earlier you buy the game, the more money you'll end up saving.) The game will be launching at $4.99 this Fall, and it could possibly cost as much as $8.99 by Fall 2014.

The game was designed to appeal to a younger casual audience, and it will take full advantage of the GamePad's capabilities, including Off-TV Play.

"Upon examining the titles coming out in the future for the Wii U, we noticed there were not many games that were directed to a larger audience and as a result, we developed a game with them in mind," said Monty Goulet, the founder of the company.

Goulet has confirmed that the game is complete and currently awaiting Lot Check. Expect Percy's Predicament to roll onto the Wii U eShop before the end of this year! – **EMILY**



Digital Destinies

Phoenix Wright's fifth adventure will be an eShop exclusive.

ACE ATTORNEY FANS in the West will soon once again be stepping into the shoes of their favorite beleaguered lawyer and mystery-magnet Phoenix Wright, thanks to the upcoming release of Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney – Dual Destinies. The game commences one year after the events of the last main installment, Apollo Justice, following Phoenix Wright's reinstatement as a defense attorney.

We first covered this game as "Ace Attorney 5" in our debut issue last January, and at the time we were looking forward to a confirmation of its release date for retail. Interestingly, though, the game will be available exclusively on the eShop in lieu of a physical release – both to reduce the time between Japanese and English releases, and to reduce the publishing risk for this niche series.

Those eager to yell "Objection!" who feel they can't "Hold It" any longer will be pleased to learn the game will arrive on October 24th, both in the United States and in Europe. (We're sure any fan will "Take That" news with joy.) – **ROBERT**

Portable Mayhem

Retro City Rampage is coming to the 3DS eShop.

WITH THE RELEASE of Retro City Rampage across several platforms in late 2012/early 2013, creator Brian Provinciano has revealed that the most successful version so far has been – surprisingly enough – the PlayStation Vita version, thanks in part to the game's pick-up-and-play style. Naturally, the next logical move would be to bring it to the Nintendo 3DS eShop, and that's exactly what he's doing.

Provinciano says it will contain all the same content as the other versions, with every mission tweaked to work with a more zoomed-in camera. However, despite being on the Nintendo 3DS, stereoscopic 3D is out due to the game's top-down perspective and the work such an endeavor would require. Hmm, a 3DS game without stereoscopic 3D? Maybe Nintendo could make a new device for that . . . – **DAVID**

Half a Genie, Twice the Adventure

With Shantae set to cast on spell on both Nintendo eShops soon, we've interrogated her "dad," Matt Bozon, to learn more.

DID YOU KNOW that WayForward's been around for almost 14 years now? They've worked on a number of great licensed titles in those years, but it's their original content that truly shines – and no other character best showcases the studio's dedication to quality than Shantae, the hair-whipping half-genie with animal transformation powers. And while Shantae may have gotten her start on the Game Boy Color, it's clear that this belly dancer is really finding her rhythm on today's platforms.

Fans of DSiWare got to experience the long-awaited sequel Shantae: Risky's Revenge back in 2010, which was our heroine's first new game since 2002. (And eight years was far too long to wait between titles.) Now, though, fans may be in store for the opposite problem – because Shantae's got not one, but two new sequels in the works!

The first new game is heading back to portables once again. It's Shantae and the Pirate's Curse for the 3DS eShop, originally revealed in the second-to-last issue of Nintendo Power, late last year. From that debut and what WayForward has shared since, we've already learned that Shantae has lost her genie powers and is teaming up with her arch-enemy, Risky Boots, to learn some pirate moves. But what else will this adventure hold for the pair? We've had a lengthy chat with WayForward's Matt Bozon all about the game.

(And we even managed to sneak in some questions about the just-announced Shantae: Half-Genie Hero for Wii U, too!)

NF: Shantae has been a beloved character for over a decade, but she really seems to be coming into her own in recent years thanks to digital distribution. How much has the shift to digital impacted your handling of the Shantae series?

MATT BOZON: Launching a new series prior to digital was a major undertaking. From concept to release, the first Shantae game was an eight-year uphill climb – a never-ending parade of pitches and demonstrations. Usually the conversation died at "female lead character." It was suggested many times that we add a selectable male character so that guys could "play the game too." That was never the point of Shantae.

Other publishers were blocked by the cost of manufacturing, and the limited shelf space at retail. This game needed a large cart, and players would need to save their game, and that drove the price up even higher. I learned the hard way that if you wanted the most expensive cart, you needed to pitch to the lowest common denominator.

Now that digital distribution is the norm, we're free to pursue any idea we believe in. It's more about how the audience responds. They can vote great games into existence with their dollars either by supporting a game at launch or by crowdfunding.

For those who aren't familiar with the franchise, could you catch us up on Shantae's adventures thus far?

The first game introduced the characters and the world. Shantae is the Guardian Genie of Scuttle Town, and she goes toe-to-toe with Risky Boots, a pirate with an evil scheme to rule the land with a steam-powered doomsday machine. Shantae foils Risky's plans and makes a lifelong enemy in the process.

In the next adventure, Risky returns with a rusty old Genie Lamp. Ignorant of the danger, Shantae dashes headlong into a trap. Risky's plan works like clockwork – Shantae loses her magic to the lamp. (But she still manages to save the day.) Now powerless, Shantae waits for the other shoe to drop!

That brings us up nicely to Shantae and the Pirate's Curse. Just how long have you guys been working on this

INTERVIEW BY KEVIN CASSIDY

title? How close are we to getting our grubby mitts on the final game?
We're only a few months away. We'd been working for a couple of months when Nintendo Power announced its closure. We accepted their generous offer to have Shantae featured as the last subscriber cover (prior to their celebration issue) despite concerns with announcing the game prematurely. There's been a team working hard all that time, but I did stop for a while to pen the DuckTales: Remastered script and to see Mighty Switch Force! 2 through to completion. Fellow director James Montagna (Adventure Time: Hey Ice King?!) and I swapped seats for a while to keep things moving. Now we're both driving the product toward a Winter release.

We understand that Shantae and Risky Boots are teaming up this time around. With the two being bitter rivals, can we expect to see some sort of power struggle as the game progresses?
The storyline has been rewritten several times since our Nintendo Power reveal, and the connection between Risky Boots and our new villain, The Pirate Master, has become a major focus. Shantae and Risky will be working together, but it's an uneasy alliance. The game has a couple of cool teamwork moments, and some plot points that play up the rivalry. There's even a whole section that has all four heroines working together – Shantae, Risky, Sky and Rotty!

This uneasy alliance between Shantae and Risky came about due to the impending resurrection of The Pirate Master, Risky's former mentor. You know this guy is bad news if Risky is trying to keep him locked away! How did The Pirate Master get to be where he is now and what would happen if he were resurrected?
He's from the backstory. The Pirate Master was destroyed by the Genies, which had something to do with Shantae's mother vanishing. Now he's gaining strength somehow, and when he returns it will mean the end of Sequin Land and the world as we know it. There's a clear hold he has over Risky Boots, which will finally give players a bit of insight into why Risky is what she is – a lot of loose threads will be wrapping up in this adventure.

Shantae is without her genie powers at the start of this game. Can you tell us more about the abilities and attributes Shantae will take on in this adventure?
Yes, as people saw in the PAX demo, Shantae has the Magic Lamp from the previous game as part of her starting arsenal. By dancing with the lamp, players can attract objects, and this ability will be used in a variety of ways. As the adventure progresses, Shantae and Risky will recover stolen Pirate Gear. These tools grant new types of mobility, but a few of them are weapons as well. Players can use the Pistol to fire low-damage pellets – great for defeating weak foes and activating switches, but no substitute for her signature hair-whip. Risky's flamboyantly oversized Pirate Hat grants hang-gliding power, and the Scimitar can be used to destroy certain objects. Combining the Scimitar with Risky's "Boots" will let players dash at high speed through enemies and obstacles. Each combo-skewered enemy will up the damage dealt – meaning that a well set up chain of foes can result in a devastating blow to a larger monster. We also have hair upgrades, weapon upgrades and the usual healing items found in previous games. And, by popular request, block based maps – as seen in Super Metroid.

Shantae's known for taking us on adventures in lush locations, dark dungeons and dank caves. What kinds of destinations can we expect to visit while trying to stop the Pirate's Curse?
The duo will be setting sail on Risky's pirate ship, which takes them beyond the land-locked areas from the previous adventures. There's no real "sailing" involved, but this allows us to travel to interesting locations like an underworld prison, desert temple, tropical islands, an ice world and even an island populated by zombies. We'll also see an expanded version of Sequin Land's mainland, which now includes the Royal Palace. And, at every turn, Risky's cursed pirate minions will be there to stand in Shantae's way.

Will Shantae and the Pirate's Curse bring back any characters from previous installments? And can we expect to meet some new friends/foes along the way?
Everyone from the previous two games is back, and we still have more characters to introduce. Some friendly, others not so much. We may even bump into Sky's mom and dad, some spring breakers, Death, a crazy Bolo fan and even a squid or two. And the Ammo Baron is back in a prominent sub-plot!

Shantae: Risky's Revenge was a wonderful welcome back for Shantae via DSiWare. Obviously, that service offered some limitations that may have kept WayForward from fully exploring what Shantae could do. How will The Pirate's Curse benefit from the extra power and lack of file size restrictions on the 3DS?

COVER GIRL

Shantae and the Pirate's Curse – the first of two new Shantae titles in development now – was honored with the prestigious cover art position of the second-to-last issue of Nintendo Power, late last year. It likely won't be the last time her adventures claim a magazine cover spot!

We have a ton more freedom. We're restricted only by time and finances. The game's been in development for a year, which has allowed for teardown and rewrites of quite a few systems, making the game silky smooth and beautifully tuned. We think you'll find this to be the best-paced, most responsive Shantae game yet.

WayForward has really come into its own with some truly high-profile titles lately (DuckTales: Remastered, Adventure Time and more), but many fans still recognize Shantae as the mascot for the company. How important is Shantae as a brand to the future of WayForward?
Shantae embodies our company spirit very well. She's not your typical hero – she was born from a love of character design and animation mixed with classic video game sensibilities. Her sound and gameplay are iconic, not literal. Her world is a series of constructed levels that are designed around carefully regimented player movement. Rules of gameplay come first, with juicy visuals existing to amplify game entertainment, but never circumventing its purpose. Above all, Shantae exists to entertain others. The same guiding principles that make our games are found in Shantae, so she makes a natural company mascot. But I think that can be said of any WayForward character that holds these attributes dear.

So far we've been talking about Shantae and the Pirate's Curse, the third game in the series that's scheduled to come to the 3DS eShop very soon. But that's not the only new Shantae you've been working on! WayForward just recently launched a Kickstarter campaign to help fund another game called Shantae: Half-Genie Hero. Can you tell us a bit about that one?
Sure! We've had a long line of classically inspired console games now, including A Boy and His Blob, BloodRayne: Betrayal, Batman: The Brave and the Bold, Double Dragon Neon and now DuckTales: Remastered. Fans have been hoping we'd make a Shantae game that's similar to these, and we'd love to. But it's really expensive to do! Most of our original games have happened between the cracks, since the contract work is our "day job." That's why we're doing the next Shantae on Kickstarter. It's going to be a big, beautiful 2D extravaganza set in the Shantae universe with more color and depth than ever. We'll keep a lot of the action the same as on handhelds, but really drive up the production values and replay incentives to keep players glued to the screen. Full animation, rich music and a big quest to take on – it's going to look like a playable Shantae TV show.

A NIGHT AND DAY DIFFERENCE

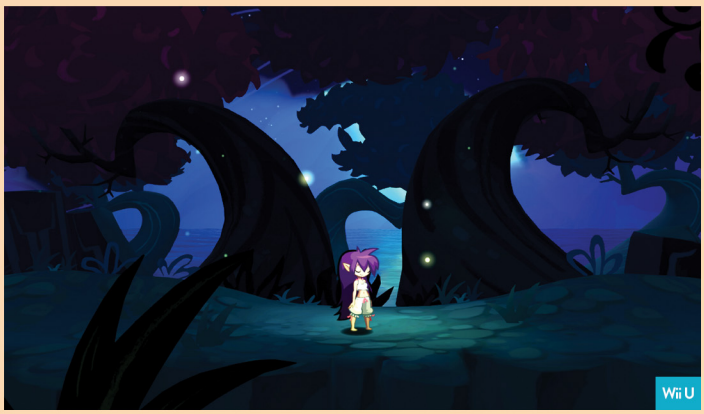
Shantae and the Pirate's Curse above and Shantae: Half-Genie Hero below – two all-new, totally distinct adventures for our heroine with two unique looks. On the 3DS, the culmination of her pixel-powered first trilogy. On Wii U, the new HD era begins.

Is it a little weird to have announced the franchise's fourth game before the third one has even been released? What does it mean for the story of the series?
I'll admit that the timing was a bit odd. But to wait until Pirate's Curse is in players hands, we'd be getting a much later start on the HD game. We've made fans wait so long for Shantae games – we decided to go for it. Half-Genie Hero will be a back-to-basics Shantae game to encourage new players. Without spoiling the ending of Curse, this starts on a blank page – a new day.

Is Shantae's new home going to be on consoles, after having always been a handheld girl before?
Half-Genie is a multi-console project, but we're also including Windows PC (via Steam), PlayStation Vita and Vita TV. We're not abandoning handheld, though this particular Shantae project won't be likely to land on 3DS. We feel pretty good about designing Pirate's Curse for 3DS – where it can really shine – and then bringing Half-Genie Hero to the HD screens. It's fun to be bringing our gal to so many new players. I can't wait to get her dancing on the big screen and really giving your home theater speakers a workout.

Last question. WayForward's brought us Mighty Flip Champs, Mighty Milky Way and two Mighty Switch Forces in the last few years. So what do you think of Keiji Inafune calling his game "Mighty No. 9?"
Ha ha! Well, we just used the word "Mighty" being fans of Mighty Bomb Jack and Mighty Final Fight. So it's not a problem – as long as Inafune-san allows Patricia Wagon to cameo.

Now if you want to talk about Skylanders: Swap Force – I demand Justice be Served!



REVIEWS

A Remasterpiece

DUCKTALES: REMASTERED

WHEN WAYFORWARD, CAPCOM and Disney came together to remake one of the most popular and oft-requested licensed games of the NES era, they had their work cut out for them. They were up to the challenge, but, at the same time, DuckTales: Remastered is nothing if not divisive. All some people wanted was to play the same game they enjoyed in their youth. Here, they get that – but so much more as well.

The most obvious change is to the graphics and sound, which make the game look and sound like an episode of the '80s cartoon. This is all the more impressive when you consider that they were able to bring back nearly the entire cast – this includes both the 93-year-old Alan Young as Scrooge and the 95-year old June Foray as Magica De Spell, making this reunion even more impressive still.

On the whole, DuckTales: Remastered is a lot deeper than the NES original, as the voices are not simply included for idle chatter. The story has been fleshed out with numerous cutscenes, along with new intro and ending stages to weave a much more complete duck tale. The dialogue fits perfectly with that of the old show, and the voice actors hit every single line out of the park in their delivery. The only downside is that sometimes the in-engine cutscenes can come along a little too frequently. They can be skipped, though that requires pulling up the pause menu and selecting the option to do so – even when several are in direct sequence.

The reason this becomes an issue is due to each stage having been remade to some degree. In addition to attempting to reach the goal, you must also collect a different number of MacGuffins in each of the five main stages, and each collectible is accompanied by a bit of dialogue from Scrooge and his friends. In most cases, there are only about three to deal with, but the first selectable stage, The Amazon, features a whopping eight to collect – meaning eight extra cutscenes, in addition to the ones which move the story along. It's nice that you can at least pause during cutscenes (a feature most games don't have the courtesy to give you), but a way to expedite the process would still be welcome.

The stages feel familiar to the original, with many of the secrets and hidden aspects retained. At the same time, there's considerably more to see and do, from an improved helicopter ride in The Amazon to more mine carts placed throughout The African Mines and Transylvania – while The Moon features a little bit of anti-gravity fun and more screen time for the awesome power of Gizmo Duck.

The controls are as good as the original's ever were, for the most part. Players may notice some eccentricities which come from Scrooge's main form of attack, the pogo jump, as the old duck's waddle-footed stance and where his cane lands make a world of difference, such as near ledges. To this end, wandering too close to a spiky area can cause Scrooge to take damage that characters would not in other games. Additionally, the ending sequence in the newly-added final stage of Magica's lair can be a nightmare to deal with, as the climbing chains frequently failed to register when I tried grabbing for them, ending with Scrooge passing right through them and subsequently dying. (Strangely, this was never an issue with any of the other chains/vines in the game.)

Other bells and whistles include four difficulty levels, an unlockable option for the original NES soundtrack and a wide range of other content you can purchase with your in-game wealth. The downside is that many of them are categorized, and you have to spend a certain amount before a new category is unlocked. Doing this requires quite a bit of cash (as does filling your money bin), and requires more playthroughs than some might be interested in putting in before they're unlocked.

8.5

DuckTales: Remastered can be summed up as extravagant, which is good in some ways, but weighs the game down in other ways – particularly for those who just want the simpler, more streamlined experience of the original. Even so, it brings everything else that made the original game great, and is definitely a worthwhile purchase.

Still, if WayForward were to add a "Classic Mode" that cut the extras and simply played like the NES game, similar to the one seen in Capcom's Mega Man: Powered Up (perhaps with Scrooge's vintage red jacket, to boot?), then DuckTales: Remastered would undoubtedly appeal to the widest possible audience.

– DAVID

Wii U PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD PRICE: $14.99

Can You Dig It?

STEAMWORLD DIG

EVERY ONCE IN a while, the work of being a games journalist allows you to make a major difference in someone's life – often without even knowing you've done so. So it was honoring for me to learn that a positive review I wrote for Image & Form's SteamWorld: Tower Defense (a 2010 release for DSiWare) was the inspiration that this creative team needed to keep developing for Nintendo platforms. Without that review, SteamWorld Dig might not have existed – not on the 3DS, at least.

So in complete humility, I will now be accepting full credit for this excellent sequel being available for you all to buy and enjoy. You're welcome, Nintendo fans.

9.5

3DS PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: IMAGE & FORM PRICE: $8.99

Self-appreciation aside, SteamWorld Dig really is a phenomenal game – it's been rocketing up the sales charts since its release, and each one of those sales is well deserved. It casts you in the role of Rusty, a steam-powered robot whose uncle (robots have uncles?) has disappeared, leaving behind a mine of mystery. It's up to you to dig down.

Way down. Then down some more. Then down even more than that, to uncover the secrets lurking in the dark.

Rusty's quest begins with only a simple pickaxe, but his excavations quickly unearth upgrades to each of his abilities. He earns a water-powered super jump. A chargeable punching attack. The capability to drill through tough chunks of rock, and more – and every piece of tech that gets attached to him can be powered up further with upgrades that can be bought from the kindly robo-townsfolk living up above the mine's entrance.

You'll get into a regular rhythm of delving into the depths, loading up on treasures and minerals, and then hightailing it back topside as Rusty's internal light source gets depleted. You'll recharge, buy some upgrades and then dive back in again, going deeper and deeper every time.

It's a truly addictive experience, as you'll find yourself always wanting to go back in to explore just a little bit further before saving and turning the game off – and especially so when you get deep enough that the game's storyline starts to subtlely shine through and you begin to learn just what it was that caused Rusty's uncle to vanish. ("He dug too greedily and too deep. He awoke something in the darkness!" Lord of the Rings, anyone?)

There's nothing but a bright future ahead for Image & Form, though, as Dig is incredible. Thanks for letting me be part of its story, guys! – **LUCAS**

Let's Get Physical

SPIN THE BOTTLE: BUMPIE'S PARTY

8.5

LET'S BE CLEAR: treating Spin the Bottle like a typical video game is a mistake. KnapNok Games' debut Wii U eShop title isn't so much a video game as it is an avant-garde party experience. Nothing about the majority of the game's current 17 mini-games are even that challenging – it's more about having fun with your friends in a wild, somewhat competitive environment (preferably with an adult beverage, if you're of legal age).

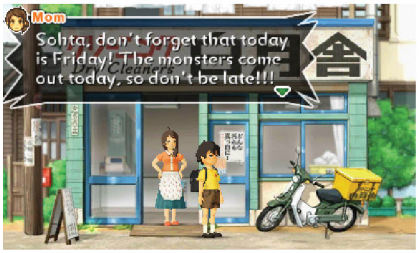
Spin the Bottle only uses the GamePad to boot, rendering the TV virtually useless. It does use Wii Remotes, though, and the number of games you can play scales up or down depending on your Wii Remote supply. Two Wii Remotes is, in my eyes, the basic requirement, as you'll then be able to play all but one of the games (that one requires four).

Wii U PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: KNAPNOK GAMES PRICE: $8.99

You can take anywhere from two to eight players through a series of randomly assorted two-person mini-games to see who earns the most victories first. The games themselves range from quirky to ridiculous. One has a player looking at the GamePad as a character makes his way through an endless runner with spikes and chasms. The second player is instructed to put the Wii Remote in his pocket and jump when the GamePad user tells him to. It's goofy and it's fantastic.

Another game makes people play fake tennis, relying on the sounds of the Wii Remotes to let them know where the ball is. Yet another requires a blindfold – one player leads the other to find a Wii Remote, which is standing up in the room somewhere, so he can grab it without knocking it over. It's all in good fun, and it works best if you're playing with people who aren't self-conscious about hugging other people – especially if you activate the extra challenges that make the games even goofier.

One of the coolest parts about Spin the Bottle is that KnapNok will continue to add content to it and raise the price after each update. However, if you buy it now, you'll get the rest of the content for free! – **NEAL**



Memories of Summer

ATTACK OF THE FRIDAY MONSTERS! A TOKYO TALE

NOSTALGIA PLAYS A major role in video games, but many titles like to recycle obvious jokes, old-school mechanics, or 8- or 16-bit graphics in order to elicit those warm, fuzzy feelings. Attack of the Friday Monsters! A Tokyo Tale refreshingly manages to reawaken your childhood spirit without utilizing overused standbys, pop-cultural references or even a common setting that many of us have experienced.

Set during the early 1970s in Japan, you control a young boy named Sohta who's just arrived in a rural town with his dry-cleaner parents. Sohta's initial chore of delivering clothes to a neighboring business owner quickly turns into an adventure, as he meets townspeople and fellow students while discovering more about the monsters who appear every Friday in nearby fields.

The setting is serene and takes place during a hot summer filled with cicadas chirping in the background. Painterly vistas sit behind polygonal characters, meshing together to create a pleasing and relaxing visual experience that conveys a sense of warmth and wonder. And that's important, since most of the game is a life simulation, where you move from plotline to plotline via dialogue (packaged into 20-plus mini-episodes).

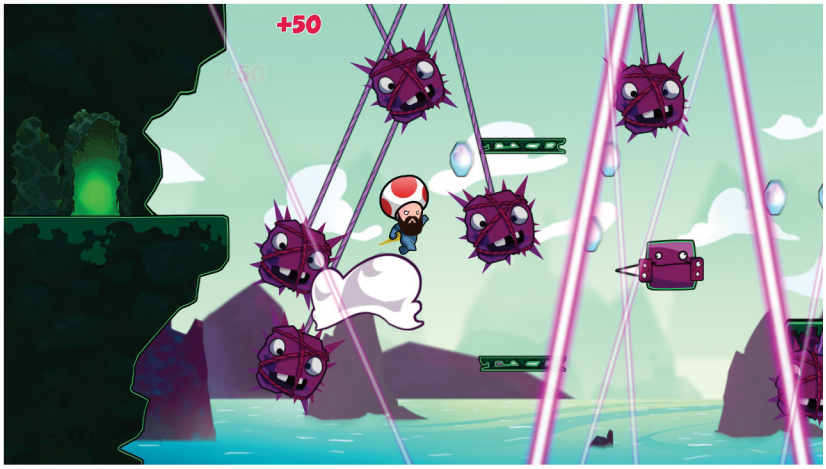
A card-collecting-and-battling mini-game also plays a small role in the story, though it revolves more around luck than any skill (it's basically a Rock-Paper-Scissors variant). Cards are scattered across the town landscapes and serve as a gateway to occasional plot advancement. Thankfully, though, the mini-game mainly stays out of the way of the adventure – it's the weakest link of the experience.

Everything else about the game fits so well, though, and provoked a longing for my childhood summers. Even though I've never been to Tokyo – and I also didn't grow up in the '70s – the game perfectly captures the playfulness and imagination of kids, no matter your nationality or generation. The parents elegantly feed into the story about monsters appearing outside town, and the game does a nice balancing act with the mysteries behind the narrative.

Altogether, Attack of the Friday Monsters is a short adventure that leaves a lasting impression – filled with warm, fuzzy feelings. – **EVAN**

9.0

3DS PUBLISHER/DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
PRICE: $7.99



Run, Jump, Die

CLOUDBERRY KINGDOM

THE PLATFORMER GENRE has been around for about 30 years now. There's a reason why this type of game became so popular in the early days of gaming – the 8-bit NES proved to be the perfect platform for platforming. But while the genre may have been born out of hardware restrictions, it's clear that running and jumping still entices gamers today.

Perhaps that has something to do with the seemingly endless amount of ways developers can twist, turn and mutate these methods of momentum.

The latest contender in the platforming genre is Cloudberry Kingdom, an indie platformer created by Pwnee Studios. This title was originally slated to launch alongside the Wii U via the eShop late last year, but plans changed as we inched closer to the system's release. Now all these months later, gamers can finally get their hands on this platforming adventure – complete with prominent promotion from Ubisoft.

One thing is very clear in Cloudberry Kingdom – the developers have gone out of their way to leave the core mechanics of platforming alone. Make no mistake, you'll be running and jumping your entire way through this experience.

It's about as pure as you can get. There's no fancy story to push you through, no elaborate level designs that throw in exploration or Metroidvania backtracking. You're just running from left to right the entire time – all while trying desperately to stay alive.

With such a simple foundation, it's a punishing level of difficulty that makes Cloudberry Kingdom a unique experience. During the main story mode, you'll be tasked with tackling level after level of precise platforming. Painfully precise, in fact, as there's almost no room for error with all of the myriad different traps, spikes and obstacles constantly swarming the screen simultaneously. And there's no room to breathe even after successfully making it past some nefarious insta-kill pitfall or swinging wrecking ball of doom – because in every split-second after you avoid death from one direction, it's always bearing down on you from another angle, immediately.

Sometimes you'll face these challenges with extra wrinkles added in, too, like having to control a tiny/floaty character or gaining the ability to double-jump. You'll have to re-learn how to play each time one of these random elements is thrown in – and while these tiny additions may seem simple enough to handle, you'll come to find that even the smallest adjustment to control can mean a big change to how you handle your running and jumping.

The other big focus of the game comes from the ability to play as you'd like. The developers have opened up a portion of their game programming toolset, which allows you to change the frequency of platforms, enemies and more. You can make levels that are as easy or hard as you want. As a matter of fact, you can make levels so devious that it seems impossible to survive a run-through. (That's when you head into the options mode and have the game show you just how to tackle your own creation.) Sure, the computer can dominate a level you've just made, but matching that success level yourself can be nearly maddening.

Even with all these bells and whistles – including a multiplayer mode for quadruple the insanity – Cloudberry Kingdom still just feels like a slightly above average platformer. You'll create levels that you can't beat. You'll run through level after level with designs that go from challenging and fun to challenging and monotonous. Even the artwork seems like an afterthought. This is a respectable platformer with some interesting ideas, but you'll never feel like any of them are put to good use. – **KEVIN C.**

6.0

Wii U PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: PWNEE STUDIOS PRICE: $9.99

10

The Fondest of Memories

EARTHBOUND

THE LIGHTS ARE out in the house, but the walls are glistening with a reflected red glow from the television. As Sarah and I stare at the screen – now emanating a ferocious screech from its violent red static – I'm practically holding my breath. Soon after, darkness fills the room and I breathe a sigh of relief. Thanks to the Wii U's Virtual Console, my wife has been able to play EarthBound for the first time, and she's just beaten the final boss.

Nearly two decades earlier, I had experienced the same exhilaration at finishing one of gaming's most intense battles and creating memories that'd stay with me forever. And since then, I've played through this adventure over and over, reliving the journey, the laughter, the spookiness and the fun. It's a title that I find immensely replayable simply due to how enjoyable it is.

EarthBound's tumultuous journey from the shelves of 1995 video stores all the way to the Wii U's long-awaited digital release is as harrowing and miraculous as its lead character's own adventure. Known as Mother 2 in Japan, EarthBound had been all but forgotten by Nintendo of America until this year. If Nintendo Power's own polls are anything to go by, this game has long been the most anticipated Virtual Console release, going all the way back to the first Wii VC's launch in 2006 – so finally seeing it come stateside is a very big deal indeed. Despite frantic pleading from its sizable fanbase, NOA wouldn't budge in bringing over the quirky quest (or its Japan-only sequel, Mother 3) to American fans. As most of you may know, they finally relented this summer and threw the Mother fans a bone.

And yet, EarthBound now has a new hurdle to overcome: could it possibly live up to eighteen years of cult hype?

EarthBound's unique style has practically become the stuff of legend, but quirkiness alone isn't the reason this adventure has resonated so richly with thousands of fans over the years. The game both pokes fun at and lovingly embraces its RPG origins, in ways that will have players laughing one moment, then enchanted the next. Despite its humor, strangeness, and even frightening subtexts, EarthBound has a lot of heart and is ultimately a powerfully optimistic piece of art.

But rest assured, it is certainly unique! Taking control of four young friends (led by Ness, a character who should be well known to all Super Smash Bros. fans), players will set forth on a grand adventure in typical RPG fashion, defeating bad guys, acquiring new items and gaining power before saving the day.

Where EarthBound really sets itself apart is in the details, and there are plenty of them. See, this game already starts off on an unusual note by utilizing a very rare setting for RPGs – not medieval fantasy, nor future dystopia, but modern day! And practically everything in the quest is built around crafting this believable, well-realized world. You make purchases at drugstores and burger joints with cash withdrawn from an ATM. You battle enemies with frying pans and baseball bats. You can rent a bicycle. You can use a teddy bear to take your damage for you. You can put ketchup on your fries to make them more potent, you can catch a cold from enemies that cough on you and you can even order a pizza (if you're willing to wait a few minutes for delivery). And while you're near the phone, give ol' Mom a call . . . because if you don't, Ness might get homesick!

That's not even touching upon the incredible things you actually do while visiting the game's numerous memorable locales. You'll relive fantastic B-movie-type horror in one village that ends with an incredible battle against a sentient pile of puke (Master Belch, hanging out over there on the bottom of Page 27). You'll experience Simpsons-level subversiveness when battling a brainwashed cult obsessed with the color blue. And, in one of the most inspired moments of the journey, you'll learn all about good level design from a man who considers building dungeons to be an art. The list goes on, but I'll leave you to discover more of its surprises!

And all of this goes down smooth with an incredibly well-realized art style. The title's visuals got lambasted by reviewers back in the '90s, but look nothing short of gorgeous today, with a perfectly consistent, inviting and unique look. The music, meanwhile, runs the gamut of genres and sounds, making for an audio experience like nothing you've heard before, guaranteed. Sampled sounds and warped, atmospheric tunes are the order of the day, and truly make EarthBound have an aural ambience all its own. To date, it's one of my favorite gaming OSTs, and the central melody that you happen to

Wii U VC ORIGINAL RELEASE: SNES, 1995 PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: APE, HAL LABORATORY PRICE: $9.99

craft as the game progresses coalesces into a powerful, memorable anthem.

Even the battle system, while seemingly simplistic at first, utilizes a number of surprisingly progressive conveniences that even many modern-day games could learn from. First up, there are no random battles at all – all enemies are approachable (or avoidable) on the map. Battles also benefit from a rolling HP meter system: when a character takes a hit, the damage doesn't subtract from their life total immediately – rather, it drains gradually, in a sort of quick countdown. So, if a player takes a mortal blow, you have a few seconds to act quickly and heal them (or defeat the monsters) before they get KO'd. That leads to some terrifically frantic moments in the latter half of the game, and adds a nice jolt of real-time adrenaline to a traditionally static battle system. Finally, EarthBound has the courtesy to not waste the player's time with weak enemies – if the characters' levels are much higher than an enemy's, the player will automatically kill the foe and even get free EXP and money from it!

While EarthBound delivers an unforgettable experience, there are a few issues that warrant mentioning. The game was originally packed with a Player's Guide for good reason, as there are a handful of situations that are easy to overlook or completely miss. Because of this, new players may want to periodically check the guide that Nintendo uploaded to their own site this year. (It's viewable from the Wii U GamePad too.) Additionally, the back half of the game gets a little dungeon-heavy and isn't as inspired as the first half.

Those issues are fairly minor considering what's here, though – EarthBound is something truly special. It's more than silly toilet humor, and more than wistful nostalgia. There's clearly an immense amount of love, craftsmanship and creativity put into this title that's rarely seen any more, or even in any previous era of the gaming industry. It's akin to a grand vacation – you never know what sort of incredible locale you'll end up in next, or what unusual character waits across the way. So if charming Nintendo-y goodness floats your boat, look no further. And if you're anything like me, you'll be happy to experience it all again and again.

EarthBound received relatively little fanfare at the time of its release, and critics of the time were generally unimpressed with the title. Impressively, however, the colorful and satirical romp has stood the test of time remarkably well, and it's as compelling a title as any you'll find this year. Not just any game can inspire me to draw all over the review page, after all!

I fully admit to being part of this EarthBound's, shall we say, passionate fanbase. But I assure you that any player going into this game with an adventurous spirit and an open mind will fall in love. A whole new generation of players has been caught under its spell since July, proving that classic Nintendo games truly are timeless.

The room was still dark, but now lit by the warm, yellow glow of the ending credits. As Sarah and I watched the final name scroll past the screen, she turned to me.

"That was so good! I want to play it again!" – **MATTHEW**

A Pokémon Stumble

POKÉMON RUMBLE U

6.0

FOR ONE REASON or another, most Pokémon spin-offs have never quite been able to capture the same combination of fun and charm as the mainline Pokémon titles. That holds particularly true for Pokémon Rumble U, the third installment in Ambrella's toy battling series. On paper, Pokémon Rumble U seems like the perfect way to expand the franchise, injecting the methodical, turn-based combat that Pokémon is traditionally known for with some frenetic, real-time action. But in practice, there's far too little depth and variety in the title to sustain its gameplay, making it little more than a mildly fun, but ultimately shallow, diversion.

Unlike a typical Pokémon adventure, Rumble U has you battling opponents not with the critters themselves, but with little plastic replicas of them. The game begins at a toy shop, where a new line of Pokémon toys is about to go on sale. As the clerks begin stocking the store shelves with these new figures, one of them slips on a wayward capsule and drops his box of merchandise, causing the toys to roll into the river and scatter downstream. Your mission is to help these lost toy Pokémon return to the toy shop, while encountering other lost figures on your way and beating them senseless until they agree to accompany you back to the store, too.

The game is divided up into several stages, each of which contains three to four different missions to clear. While some impose certain conditions for you to fulfill (guard a fortress, protect a specific Pokémon), each one plays out in largely the same fashion: pummel a horde of enemy Pokémon, collect as many tokens and capsules as possible and defeat the oversized boss that comes crashing down partway through the challenge.

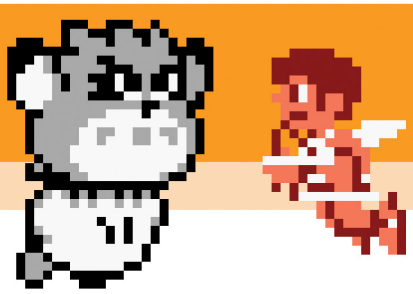
As simple as the gameplay sounds, there are moments of fun to be had with Pokémon Rumble U, particularly if you have a friend to play it with. Bashing your way through a crowd of toy Pokémon is immediately satisfying, and the game even incorporates some semblance of strategy in the Pokémon you select to accompany you into battle, keeping the gameplay from becoming entirely mindless.

What sets Pokémon Rumble U apart from other titles in its series is the ability to purchase special figurines (see Page 10) and import them into the game using the GamePad's NFC function, which is as simple as placing the figure on the bottom-left corner of the controller while on the character selection screen. You can also access a dedicated menu from the title screen where you can spend any tokens you've earned on new abilities and stat upgrades for your figures, thereby improving their usefulness. For collectors and younger Pokémon fans, this adds a fun new dimension to the game as they collect and "train" their favorite monsters in real life and use them in their virtual battles.

Unfortunately, even with a slight layer of strategy underpinning the gameplay, Rumble U is far too monotonous to be entertaining for long. While the game encourages players to consider type advantages when selecting a party, the most effective way to clear a mission is to just spam your strongest attack. Likewise, the chaos of battle can make it difficult to keep track of the action, particularly when the screen is overflowing with Pokémon. Couple these issues with the nondescript battle arenas and the ugly character models, which do little to take advantage of Wii U's added horsepower, and the game becomes largely forgettable.

Only the most ardent Pokémaniacs will enjoy Pokémon Rumble U. – **KEVIN K.**

Wii U PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: AMBRELLA PRICE: $17.99



The VC Round-Up

AFTER A SLOW roll out early this year (paired up with the popular "30 cent games" promotion), the Wii U Virtual Console has now officially launched -- and it's been picking up steam fast. So many different games from yesteryear have now reappeared in the Wii U eShop that it's becoming almost impossible to keep up with them all! We're going to round up some of the best bets for you right here, though (along with the separate 3DS VC service, too).

Let's start on the portable, actually. Kirby's Dream Land 2 is there now – an unsung Kirby sequel from back in the black-and-white Game Boy days. It still holds up well, as it's much longer and more robust than its predecessor and it introduced a trio of fun animal friends for Kirby to partner with.

Wario Land 3 is another sequel you may have never had a chance to play before, either, and it's back via 3DS VC now too. It's one of Wario's greatest adventures, a Game Boy Color classic that's all about Nintendo's smelliest hero tracking down treasure and facing off against a killer clown named Rudy. (Who later showed up in Dr. Mario 64. Odd, I know.)

Tecmo Bowl is also a good nostalgia option, especially now that football season has started again; Summer Carnival '92 RECCA is a wild shoot-'em-up previously on available in Japan (though I'm not sure why Nintendo made such a big deal about bringing it to America now, as I don't think anyone was asking for it), and the old NES port of Donkey Kong is still clunking along, causing modern Nintendo fans to waste their cash. (I'm not a big fan of that version.)

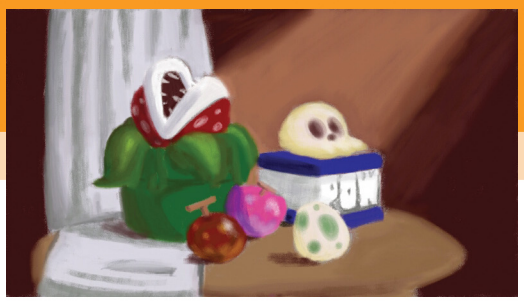
That same old DK port is also on Wii U (where it only cost 30 cents for a while, and I still didn't buy it). Let's transition to talking about what is worthwhile on the big machine, though.

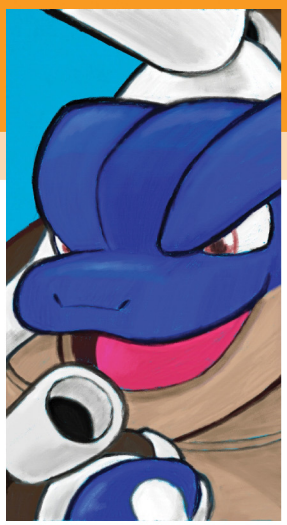
Kid Icarus is a favorite of mine from the NES days, but I'd warn you away from the Wii U VC version if you also own a 3DS – 3D Classics: Kid Icarus is the superior choice. You can't go wrong with the original Legend of Zelda or Super Mario Bros. in any format, though, and both of them are great with the GamePad in hand.

Zelda II is also back again, this time on Wii U – our debut issue discussed the use of Restore Points to finish tough games like it, and this is your first chance to use those save states on the big screen.

Natsume's Harvest Moon is a seed-sowing classic that's just as enjoyable as any of its million sequels have been since, so consider going old-school to save cash on that series.

And, lastly, Capcom's sent three different Street Fighters in the Wii U eShop. "Super" is the best. – **LUCAS**





Artists' First Steps

ART ACADEMY: SKETCHPAD

7.0

THOSE OF YOU with long memories may recall Mario Paint, Nintendo's first foray into art games, released in 1992 alongside the clunky SNES Mouse. It may have been primitive, but in an era when home computers were a rarity, it was the first taste many of us had of creating digital art.

And how far we've come in 20 years! In this era of expensive art software and drawing tablets, Art Academy: SketchPad is an impressive package available for a budget price on the Wii U eShop.

While the Art Academy series traditionally teaches you art techniques using real materials, SketchPad places less of an emphasis on the "Academy" aspect – it simply gives you a set of tools and leaves you alone to create.

You start by choosing the texture and color of your canvas, then call up your materials by tapping on the handle at the bottom of the GamePad screen or pressing the shoulder buttons. You can choose from sketching pencils, colored pencils or pastels, along with erasers and smudge sticks – all in a range of sizes.

With so much choice before you've even put pencil to paper (or stylus to screen), it can be hard to know where to begin. SketchPad helps by providing reference photographs that can be displayed on the TV. You can call up a grid overlay or zoom in on your artwork to capture the fine details.

Trying to get comfortable with the GamePad can be a problem. It's too easy to brush against the screen with your hand or knock the shoulder buttons, causing unwanted lines to be drawn. With no "undo" button, you're often left with no choice but to patch up the mistake.

Once you're happy with your masterpiece, save it to your portfolio and then share it with the thriving Art Academy: SketchPad community on Miiverse, where a growing number of artists are sharing hundreds of new creations every day.

There are two further options, Lessons and Gallery, but these are locked until a later update. It would be nice to see more materials added in the future as well, such as watercolors or chalks, to flesh out the already impressive tool kit.

If you aren't used to real art materials, Art Academy: SketchPad can take a little adjusting to. But being able to create as much art as you like, and sharing it with a huge community – all for less than the cost of a set of sketching pencils – definitely make this a worthy purchase for any budding Van Goghs out there. – **MARK**

Wii U PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: HEADSTRONG GAMES PRICE: $3.99

Attack the Darkness

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: CHRONICLES OF MYSTARA

5.0

WHEN YOU THINK of Dungeons & Dragons, you probably envision lots of graph paper, a 20-sided die and a group of friends with fantastic imaginations. When Capcom thinks of D&D, they imagine a group of friends huddled around an arcade machine. (At least, that's how they thought all the way back in the '90s.)

Here in 2013, Capcom's decided to cram their old-school arcade games Dungeons & Dragons: Tower of Doom and Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara into one downloadable package. Their goal was to recreate the classic arcade experience in your living room. The execution of their idea is fantastic, but the game itself is more frustrating than fun.

It's very clear that Capcom (with Iron Galaxy) have done a great job bringing these coin-op classics over to Wii U – you're getting an experience that accurately re-creates the arcade feel from back in the day. There are all sorts of visual features to make things look more retro, including scanlines, arcade cabinet borders and more. You even have online play this time around, further underscoring how many technical bells and whistles were added.

Then what's the problem, you ask? You'll quickly learn that these games were originally made with one purpose, which was to eat quarters like crazy. Tough-but-fair is just fine in a game, but Chronicles of Mystara's action can be downright unbalanced. Thankfully, nowadays we can pump in virtual quarters to continue the game, but that leaves us with reliving an annoying and shallow experience that aimed for cash first and fun second.

Chronicles of Mystara has top-notch production values that should be applauded. It also brings interesting wrinkles not often seen in this genre, including item shops, experience points, multiple sub-weapons and branching paths. Too bad all of that is overshadowed by a gameplay experience that was originally out to drain your wallet rather than put a smile on your face. – **KEVIN C.**

Wii U PUBLISHER: CAPCOM
DEVELOPER: IRON GALAXY PRICE: $14.99

Pokémon RED VERSION

TOP SECRET

How to Capture Mew

Hint: You won't find anything under that old truck.

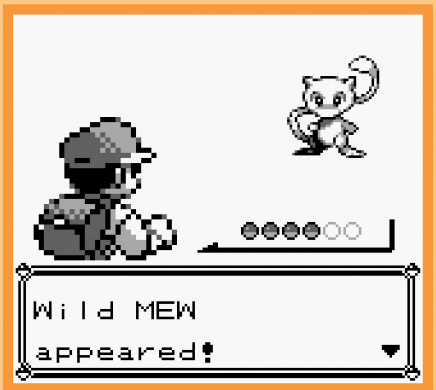
POKÉMON #151, MEW, originally wasn't meant to be found or captured within the series' first generation of games – it was only supposed to be available through special contests and events. However, Pokémon Red Version (as well as Blue and Yellow) have a number of well-known glitches, a few of which make it possible to capture the elusive Mew. The most flexible of these is the "Ditto Glitch," which will allow you to capture any Pokémon of your choice.

First you'll need a Pokémon with a precisely designated Special stat. (Which Pokemon you'll encounter receive depends on this number.) If you're going for Mew, a Pokémon with a Special stat of exactly 21 is required – as well as a Pokémon that can Fly or Teleport. Once you've got those creatures in your team, find a trainer that will engage in battle as soon as the player is in that trainer's line of sight. (You know, one of the ones who gets an exclamation point above their head and walks straight at you when you come close enough.)

Next, right before the trainer sees you, press Start and Fly or Teleport to a location where you can find wild Ditto and another trainer to fight (Route 15 in Red/Blue or the Pokémon Mansion in Yellow). Initiate a battle with the trainer such that there is at least one space between the you and trainer. Defeat the trainer. After this, encounter a wild Ditto and send out your Pokémon with the desired Special stat (again, that's 21 if you're going for Mew). Battle the Ditto until it uses Transform to mimic your Pokémon and then defeat the Ditto.

Now, head back to the location where you evaded the first trainer without battling (the location you flew or teleported away from). A menu will automatically appear. Press B to dismiss it, and a battle with Mew (or your desired Pokémon) will begin. Capture the Pokémon to add it to your collection.

Note: If the Special stat of the Pokémon you used doesn't correspond to a regular Pokémon in the game's inner code, you may end up running into the infamous "Missingno," or another of Generation I's "glitch Pokémon!" – **AARON**



New SUPER LUIGI BROS. U

Play as Nabbit in Single-Player Mode

Unlock the invulnerable bandit for your solo runs.

TO PLAY AS the indestructible Nabbit rather than Luigi in single-player mode, simply hold ZL on the GamePad or Pro Controller or B on the Wii Remote and choose a stage. In the final Star Road level, use this trick to play as your Mii instead! – **AARON**

Free Toys!

Use these passwords to unlock extra Pokémon, no strings attached.

Pokémon RUMBLE U

LIKE THE TWO previous Pokémon Rumbles, the new Rumble U allows you to access a variety of free monsters – if you know the right passwords to enter. Here's a collection of several to get you started! (Note that these are North American codes only!) – **LUCAS**

HAXORUS: 53658779 | **HYDREIGON:** 78897697 | **EELEKTROSS:** 78871053
GYARADOS: 60536144 | **MAGIKARP:** 16713311 | **CHANDELURE:** 79702521
SNIVY: 55149930 | **TEPIG:** 17171075 | **OSHAWOTT:** 45507682 | **SABLEYE:** 52051808
ZOROARK: 04811884 | **STUNFISK:** 02337796 | **GARCHOMP:** 97988814
SNORLAX: 43265987 | **WHIMSICOTT:** 65501535 | **CHARIZARD:** 68110948
AND YES, EVEN DUNSPARCE: 73442047

REST Q

The sitcom starring a final boss and an obnoxious '90s game mascot

Wii U 3DS PUBLISHER: D3 PUBLISHER
DEVELOPER: WAYFORWARD
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 12, 2013

ADVENTURE TIME:
EXPLORE THE DUNGEON BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW!
Come on, grab your friends! (Seriously, three of them. This one's got multiplayer.)

WAYFORWARD'S ADVENTURE TIME: Hey Ice King! Why'd You Steal Our Garbage?! was a great introduction into the video game world for this crazy Cartoon Network animated series – but while that title was quite wonderful, it was clear that a lot more could still be done with the franchise. Lucky for us, WayForward has stepped back into the developer role a second time to give us that game's sequel, Adventure Time: Explore the Dungeon Because I DON'T KNOW!. And, even better than that, this second outing is landing on both Wii U and 3DS!

While AT:HIK!WYSOG?! was clearly an homage to Zelda II: The Adventure of Link, AT:EtDBIDK! is taking the gameplay in a different direction. If you're a fan of hack-and-slash games like Gauntlet, you'll be happy to know that Explore the Dungeon will let you, well, explore all sorts of dungeons – while playing as Finn, Jake, Marceline, Flame Princess, Lumpy Space Princess, Cinnamon Bun, Jake Jr. and others. You'll have the option to upgrade your abilities along the way via an in-game hub and also purchase a few items from the one-and-only Choose Goose. Best of all, Adventure Time's second game will let you grab up to four friends for some local multiplayer action.

Perhaps the most intriguing feature of this new video game, though, is something that will have ramifications beyond the scope of the game itself. While there will no doubt be plenty of jokes and references to the Adventure Time TV series included in this quest, it's been revealed that Explore the Dungeon will play a critically important role in the cartoon's story.

Series creator Pendelton Ward says that this Adventure Time game will include a huge plot reveal that will eventually echo into a future episode of the cartoon. You'll have to fight your way through the entire game to find out what that secret is, but it's clear that the reveal will send shockwaves through the entire Candy Kingdom. Algebraic!

Let's just hope the Ice King isn't behind all of this! – **KEVIN C.**

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
Booyakasha!

STRAP ON YOUR colored bandanas and grab a New York slice, because the Turtles are back! (And that means it's time for another video game adaption!) Activision has snagged the license from Ubisoft and is prepping a new installment based on the the current Nickelodeon cartoon. Simply titled Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, it's a Wii/3DS side-scrolling brawler in the same vein as the Konami classics of old. Although the prospect of heroes on a portable shell sounds appealing, you'll only get local four-player co-op on the Wii version. Recent Turtles games haven't exactly been met with critical acclaim, and early footage of this latest entry didn't make a good impression. But what am I saying? It's Ninja Turtles! At the very least, it'll be a decent weekend rental to enjoy with three of your friends. – **TONY**

Wii 3DS PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPER: MAGIC POCKETS
RELEASE: OCTOBER 22, 2013

Wii PARTY U

Nintendo turns to tabletop gaming. (Sort of. You could really use any flat surface, I guess.)

ONE OF THE most enjoyable party games in recent memory was Wii Party, a casual Mii-focused design that did some interesting things with the Wii Remote in its array of ridiculous house party games. Now, the party's back for a second round – and this time it brought the Wii U GamePad along for the ultimate fun- filled adventure!

I was able to go hands-on with Wii Party U at the recent Gamescom event and came away wanting to get my hands back on the game as soon as possible. The most interesting new additions are the brand-new tabletop games. In these games, you place the GamePad down on a flat surface and sit on the opposite side from another player, going head-to- head across the "arena" of the Pad's touch screen. I got a chance to play a few simple mini-games that captured Nintendo's signature two-sided multi- player dynamic (being able to either work together with others to help one another, or working against your friends to annoy them).

My partner/opponent and I first tried to knock down a tree together, then cooperated in catching a fish. Then the gloves came off and we duked it out one-on-one, playing some slot-car racing and doing some heavy touch screen tapping in a small sumo arena. The mini-games were simple yet addictive – but they weren't where the tabletop madness ended.

There are also somewhat longer games, each one featuring its own objectives and unique gameplay. My friend/foe and I took on Tabletop Gauntlet, where we had to guide balls through a deadly obstacle course – with each of us only using one analog stick and a single shoulder button.

Not every game takes place entirely on the Pad's small screen, of course, though it still plays an important role for many of the games with action primarily displayed up on your TV. In the regular mini-games we got to toy around with, one player used the GamePad while the others (up to three) had Wii Remotes at the ready.

One four-player game involved having the GamePad player place traps in a maze while the rest had to try to find their way out. In another, the Pad wielder attacked with touch screen weaponry as innocent Miis ran for their lives.

And for those of you out there who aren't big GamePad fans, Party U has games that don't use it at all (just to cover all the bases).

I've only just talked about a few of the crazy ideas in store for Party-goers – there will be plenty more to discover in the final package. I honestly can't wait to get my friends together with this one! – **DAAN**

Wii U
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NDCUBE
RELEASE: OCTOBER 25, 2013

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: BLACK FLAG

Yo ho, yo ho, a pirate's life for me!

ALTHOUGH IT MAY be far from the fourth overall game in the lengthy Assassin's Creed franchise, the brotherhood is at it again for their proper quaternary outing in Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag. Once again you'll dive into the Animus simulation, but this time as the morally questionable pirate Edward Kenway, who will loot, plunder and hijack his way through the Golden Age of Piracy – a period that covers the late 17th century through the early 1700s. Using your trusty ship, the *Jackdaw*, you'll travel all across the Caribbean and parts of Florida, enjoying general debauchery.

The open world in Black Flag will be the most vast it's ever been, with an emphasis on early exploration rather than forced linear missions and a litany of walled-off areas. Kenway will have plenty of help, as he can readily call upon his jolly band of pirate assassins and his fully upgradeable ship. Historical characters will return once again in true Assassin's Creed fashion, including the infamous Blackbeard and the father of the Jolly Roger, Calico Jack.

The intriguing multiplayer mode introduced in Assassin's Creed Brotherhood returns, with all-new mechanics in tow. For starters, you'll be able to climb on trees, a skill that wasn't utilized in Assassin's Creed III's multiplayer – it's a critical technique you'll need to master for the game's brand new, diverse set of levels. You'll also be able to play around with the "Game Lab," a tool of sorts that allows players to set a predetermined array of parameters for matches, such as the ability to only kill from a ranged location.

Off-TV Play on the GamePad screen will return for the Wii U version of Black Flag, but not a whole lot else will separate this edition from other systems' versions. Hopefully Ubisoft can step up their game and add support for the iPad companion app, or give us something else entirely to entice Nintendo fans to bite – launching the DLC at the same time as other platforms would be a start. – **CHRIS**

Wii U PUBLISHER: UBISOFT DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTREAL
RELEASE: OCTOBER 29, 2013

CALL OF DUTY: GHOSTS

Gaming's mega-selling shooter series returns to Wii U.

IT'S HARD TO believe, but Call of Duty: Ghosts will mark Treyarch's seventh year in row making one of the most popular games in the world for Nintendo's home console. After a fine debut last year with Black Ops II on Wii U, the Santa Monica, California-based developer will handle the port of the latest game, which is created by Infinity Ward.

Set 10 years after an apocalyptic event, Call of Duty: Ghosts follows a small squad of American soldiers. Early footage makes allusions that the United States is no longer a dominant world power, and players see the action through the eyes of a single fighter and his brother, who both grew up in the post-ravaged country. This is a considerable departure for Infinity Ward, as their previous Call of Duty titles have traditionally maintained story connections with each other. Ghosts, though, presents a brand new world that has nothing to do with the Modern Warfare universe.

The other significant single-player highlight is the writer behind the campaign – Stephen Gaghan. The director and author (who helmed the film Syriana and penned the screenplay for Traffic) is an Academy Award-winner who brings a lot of prestige and potential to Call of Duty: Ghosts. Black Ops II introduced player decisions, which were a welcomed addition, so seeing what a renowned Hollywood writer will now bring to the table will be exciting.

Another piece of thrilling news is character customization in multiplayer, especially the option to play as a woman. Players now can inject some personality onto their online avatar. Dynamic maps are another bullet point from publisher Activision, as stages will change throughout the course of battles and matchups – for example, one area showcases a gas station that comes crumbling down on top of soldiers if a player blows away the base of pillars with a high-explosive weapon. The shifting landscapes will hopefully introduce a fun and strategic shot in the arm to online matches.

But that's not all. Activision promises 14 new maps out of the box and more than 20 new killstreaks. And then there's Squads, which Infinity Ward is touting as one of the best new enhancements to the annual franchise. The new co-op/multiplayer mode includes Squad versus Squad, in which you and your squad skirmish against another player and their A.I. team; Squad Assault, where you play cooperatively with up to six people against an offline user's squad; Wargame, where you pick five team members to battle against the A.I.; and finally, Safeguard, which riffs on Survival from Modern Warfare 3 (and looks similar to Zombies) as four players fend off against wave after wave of enemies.

For Wii U, Call of Duty: Ghosts will offer Wii Remote and second-screen support via the GamePad – though some questions still remain. (We don't know if DLC will be available for Wii U, for instance.) Whether or not that happens, though, Treyarch's proven track record on the Big N's machines means that this newest game in the world's biggest FPS franchise will almost certainly be one of their best yet. – **EVAN**

Wii U PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION
DEVELOPERS: INFINITY WARD / TREYARCH RELEASE: NOVEMBER 5, 2013

SCRIBBLENAUTS UNMASKED

Maxwell crosses over into the DC Universe.

IT'S UNDOUBTEDLY A question we've all asked ourselves at some point in our lives – could Batman beat Superman, if young Bruce Wayne were equipped with a bazooka that fired gerbils and the Man of Steel was garbed in a flaming, gelatinous-tutu? What if The Flash were introduced to the bout, but chained to an irate robotic Wonder Woman? Well, the developers at 5th Cell are set to answer these pressing questions (and many more!) with the release of Scribblenauts Unmasked, a new DC Comics-flavored installment in their popular Scribblenauts series. Following on from the Wii U launch title Scribblenauts Unlimited, Unmasked draws upon publisher Warner Bros' ownership of DC Comics to infuse a whole host of comic book characters and objects into Scribblenauts' already impressive vocabulary. Puzzles take place within a wealth of locales spanning several DC properties, tasking series protagonist and mascot Maxwell with retrieving Starites using his magical object-creating notepad – while creating as much mayhem as possible. The amount of DC items added to the game promises to be impressive. As well as more obscure characters such as Bloodwynd (go look him up, I'll wait), Scribblenauts Unmasked boasts several examples of Batman's different iterations and the myriad of Green Lanterns we've seen over the years. Far from a quick expansion pack, Scribblenauts Unmasked also introduces the Bat-Computer, an in-game thesaurus featuring detailed descriptions of the wealth of DC Comics characters and objects present – a true DC aficionado could lose hours in this aspect of the game alone, trawling through the rich history that this unique collaboration affords. It's the diehard comic book fan that will get the most out of Scribblenauts Unmasked then, but the series' accessible gameplay, inviting premise and goofy sense of humor make this game one to watch for anyone even remotely interested in placing our favorite caped crusaders in increasingly ridiculous situations.

Slated for release in the States on September 24th, it won't be long before players can find out who is the most powerful: Superman's faithful mutt Krypto, or a sentient block of cheese? **– ROBERT**

Wii U 3DS PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. I. E.
DEVELOPER: 5TH CELL
RELEASE: SEPTEMBER 24, 2013

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

Before the Asylum, before the City.

ROCKSTEADY, THE ORIGINAL developer of Batman's "Arkham" games, is passing the proverbial torch to Warner Bros. Games Montreal for the third installment in the series – though it's not another sequel. Instead, Origins will be a prequel to Arkham Asylum (just not necessarily an origin story, despite the title). The developers are saying that this is "Year Two Batman," as he's moved on from battling petty thugs and mobsters to facing off against the crime bosses of Gotham.

The supervillains have now taken notice of the Batman as well, as Black Mask is furious enough with the Bat's meddling to put a bounty on his head. This sets into motion Gotham's worst and most proficient assassins, like Deathstroke, Deadshot, Firefly, Copperhead, and even the Joker. Some of these rogues are meeting Batman for the first time in this story, which pulls its inspiration from several of DC's best-selling Batman story arcs. The story also focuses heavily on the complex interplay between Bruce Wayne and Alfred Pennyworth, broadening the player's view of the dilemmas of being a vigilante playboy millionaire.

Players may recognize certain areas, as the majority of the game will be in Old Gotham (the area that will be walled off to create Arkham City.) New Gotham is also accessible, and will feature a more modernized urban area for Batman to explore. While the gameplay might be unchanged because it has served the series well, there will be new enemies to keep veteran players on their toes.

Warner Bros. has announced that a new voice cast is taking over in this installment, but fans wondering what the change means can rest at ease; the new trailers show that they are talented and ready to deliver a great performance. An impressive amount of time and effort was spent on motion-capture, making sure characters behave correctly and move convincingly.

The game will hit stores October 25th, and retailers are offering all sorts of bonuses and limited editions, including character skins, challenge maps, playable Deathstroke, grapnel guns, figures, statues and all sorts of other goodies. Do some research if you plan to pre-order! **– BRETT**

Wii U PUBLISHER: WARNER BROS. I. E. DEVELOPER: WARNER BROS. GAMES MONTREAL RELEASE: OCTOBER 25, 2013

THE ABC's OF Pokémon X & Y

Your alphabetical guide to what's new in Pokémon's sixth generation.

A IS FOR POKÉMON-AMIE.

Taking a page out of the playbook of the virtual pet genre, Pokémon X and Y will introduce Pokémon-Amie, an interface that allows you to pet, feed and play with the monsters in your team using the stylus and touch screen – your Pokémon may even want you to mimic their movements, as the 3DS camera captures your face and the tilt of your head. It seems like nothing more than a simple diversion, but Amie will actually have an impact on normal gameplay as well – if you spend time here with your creatures and keep them well fed with PokéPuff, you could see stat bonuses show up for them in battle. Not a bad trade for investing some virtual play time, right?

B IS FOR BETTER BALANCE.

Game Freak has made an effort to bring better balance to the Pokémon series' core gameplay with each new generation that comes along, but X and Y are taking some of the biggest steps yet. From introducing an all-new type that will help even out the Super Effectiveness mix (more on that later) to reworking existing types and status effects, everything just feels much more like it makes sense now.

For example – Ice-type Pokémon can now no longer be Frozen. Fire-types can no longer be Burned. Grass-types? You can't effect them with moves like Spore or Sleep Powder any more, while Ghost-types can't be trapped in a fight by a move like Mean Look. Electric-types can't be Paralyzed and Steel-types, previously resistant to just about every other type in the game, have actually lost a couple of those resistances to make them a bit less like untouchable walls.

All of these little adjustments help to better balance the array of Pokémon, giving more creatures that extra something special about them.

BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

C IS FOR CUSTOMIZATION.

At long last! Here's a feature that fans have been wanting for years – the ability to actually visually alter what your human trainer looks like. Being able to pick whether you were a boy or a girl was the previous extent of customization, but X and Y will open up the world of fashion – you'll be able to dress your character in a vast variety of outfits, change their hair, accessorize and more.

The Pokémon are getting into the act too, at least in part – a new shaggy dog Pokémon, Furfrou, will let you trim its hair into several different styles and then see your work in battle.

Finally, ethnicity is adjustable as well. You'll be able to select from different skin tones when beginning your quest across Kalos!

D IS FOR DUNSPARCE, THE DULLEST, DOPIEST & DUMBEST OF ALL POKÉMON.

Unlike Pokémon Black and White (which presented nothing but all-new monsters to capture until you'd defeated the Elite Four), X and Y will have classic monsters in the mix from the beginning. That means, sadly, that there's a good chance we'll have to run into a Dunsparce at some point. Many of the older 'mons are great, and I wouldn't mind encountering a few of my old favorites along the way – especially since they'll all be in 3D this time around. When you come across an old non-fave like this goofball in a new game, though, it just feels like an opportunity being missed to feature something new and fresh instead. Of course, there's hope for even Dunsparce, because . . .

E IS FOR EVOLUTION.

Yes, even that dopey old non-evolving land snake has hope again with each new game, as the developers at Game Freak occasionally reach back into the past and give new, more powerful evolved forms to monsters that we've known for years. Black and White took a break from this practice, but we already know it's happening again in X and Y thanks to Sylveon, the newest Eeveelution – if Eevee's evolving again, then I'd say every 'mon in the back catalog is fair game once again.

Complicating factors a bit is the introduction of the new Mega Evolution mechanic (see Page 39), as it raises the question of which kind of evolution would be appropriate for old-timers like Dunsparce – Mega, or traditional? (For him, maybe both.)

F IS FOR THE FAIRY-TYPE.

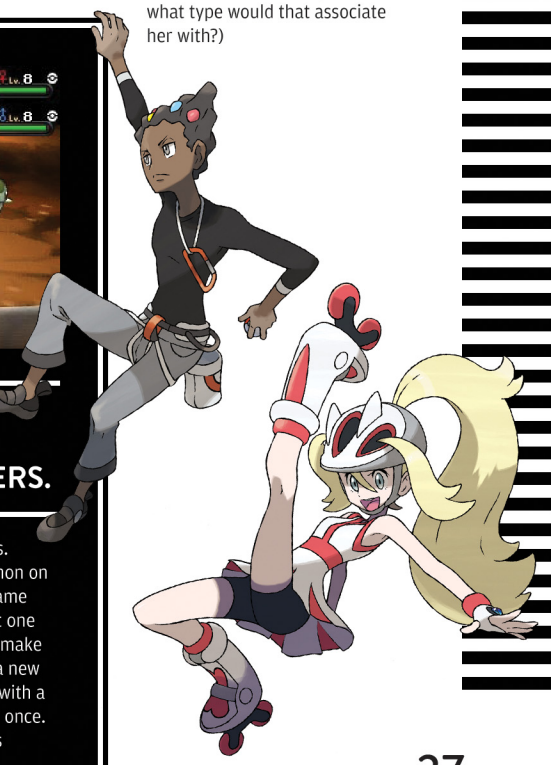
The rumors were true! We all suspected something funny was going on when Nintendo pulled back the curtain on Sylveon but then didn't confirm what type of monster it would be – some speculated that a new, 18th type would be added, and those who guessed that guessed right. Fairy is the newest type to join the Pokémon series' criss-crossing grid of Rock/Paper/Scissors attack effectiveness, and it's being introduced now to counter-balance the previously overpowered Dragon type. Fairy is the first new type to be introduced since way back in Pokémon Gold and Silver from the Game Boy Color days, and it's got a lot of catching up to do – so Game Freak is helping to populate the Fairy family by re-classifying some classic monsters. Creatures from the series' earliest generations like Azumarill, Mawile and Gardevoir will now be half-Fairy (and we expect many more, too. Clefairy is a no-brainer.) And if you're thinking the "Fairy" name sounds odd, well, think of more like "Magic." It's that mystical sense of wonder in nature, like Hayao Miyazaki has captured so well in Studio Ghibli films.

G IS FOR GYM LEADERS & GYM BADGES.

For all the things that are changing in Pokémon X and Y, some things are staying solidly the same. The overall structure of the adventure is still what we've always been used to, in that your journey through the Kalos Region will be defined by your travels from one Gym to the next, taking on the Gym Leaders that reside there and earning Badges as proof of your skill as a Pokémon Trainer. And, as usual, X and Y's Gym Leaders will associate themselves entirely with one of the 18 different Pokémon types. We've got the nature photographer Viola who commands Bug-types (she's a shutterbug, you know), the rock climber Grant (a Rock-type specialist for sure) and Korrina, who loves rollerblading. (Wait, what type would that associate her with?)

H IS FOR HORDE ENCOUNTERS.

Pokémon started with nothing but one-on-one battles. Then double battles were introduced, with two Pokémon on each side. Then two different kinds of triple battles came along, making things a full three-on-three affair – but one thing the Pokémon series' battles have never done is make their sides uneven. Until now! Horde Encounters are a new type of fight that will overwhelm your lead Pokémon with a gang of five different opponents to face off against at once. Packing wide, crowd-affecting moves into your team's moveset seems like a wise move now!



I IS FOR INDIVIDUAL VALUES.

Individual Values have always been invisible stats that help determine how powerful your Pokémon can become. Luckily, Game Freak is bringing those hidden elements into the light in X and Y, and you'll even be able to increase your monsters' Effort Values (another invisible stat) through new Super Training mini-games.

J IS FOR JUNICHI MASUDA.

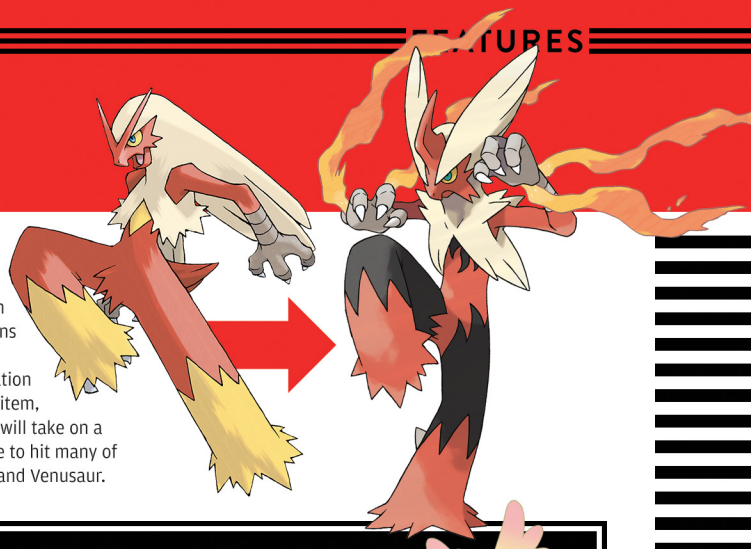
One of the founding members of Game Freak, Junichi Masuda is a man whose role has expanded again and again as the Pokémon series has grown. He's a composer first and foremost, having given the series its signature songs and sound effects for years – but beginning with Ruby and Sapphire he began to take on the duties of directing as well. With X and Y, his work will come full circle – he's directing these games too, but their soundtrack (including Junichi's compositions) will get extra recognition through a standalone iTunes release.

K IS FOR THE KALOS REGION.

After four generations of presenting regions that were geographically close to one another (and all based on areas of Japan), the Pokémon series deviated from the norm in Black and White by bringing us to Unova, a region based largely on New York City and its surrounding area. Now, Game Freak's cartographers have turned their attention to France – the new Kalos Region is modeled after that European nation, featuring meandering rivers, ancient castles and the central Lumiose City, based on Paris and made complete with an Eiffel Tower-esque landmark built right in the middle. Kalos, according to Mr. Masuda, means "beauty,"

L IS FOR LINKING UP.

Pokémon's two-version tradition continues, as you'll still need both editions of the game (or a friend who has the one opposite yours) to be able to catch 'em all – because there are some monsters that are only obtainable in one of them. For example, Clauncher and Swirlix are only in X, while Skrelp and Spritzee are only in Y. (Along with the box legendaries.) Time to link up!



M IS FOR MEGA EVOLUTION.

X and Y's most controversial new addition to the series, Mega Evolution is a new method of making older 'mons take one more evolutionary step – though only temporarily, for the duration of a battle. If you have the right hold item, your Pokémon has a high enough level and you activate the new Mega Ring item, your old-school ally will take on a brand-new form. Not every old Pokémon will get a new Mega Evolution, but Game Freak's making sure to hit many of the fan favorites – like Blaziken, Garchomp and the original Kanto Starter trio of Charizard, Blastoise and Venusaur.

N IS FOR NEW POKÉMON!

The biggest draw of each new Pokémon generation is always the new Pokémon themselves, and the Kalos Region will be packed full of faces you've never seen before. Gender differences took a bit of a back seat in Black and White (only being represented by the Frillish/Jellicent family), but they're making a more prominent return this time around thanks to creatures like Meowstic and Pyroar. You'll also have to adapt to a few all-new ways to evolve your monsters too, some of which can only be done now that the 3DS hardware is in use – Inkay, for example, will evolve into Malamar only if you physically turn your system upside-down.

O IS FOR ONLINE.

X and Y will expand your ability to find and trade monsters with gamers all around the world – you will finally be able to request to receive Pokémon even if you haven't registered them in your Dex.

P IS FOR YOUR POSSE.

Rather than just one or two rivals, X and Y will give you a whole gang of friends to adventure alongside – including Tierno the aspiring dancer, Trevor the Pokédex nerd and Shauna, the hyperactive ball of energy.

Q IS FOR QUICKER MOVEMENT.

Getting around the Pokémon world has always been stiff, with your characters locked into moving only straight up, down, left or right. X and Y finally introduces diagonals! (And we're also getting some pace-quickening rollerskates to use, too.)

S IS FOR SKY BATTLES!

This one gets an exclamation point thanks to the fact that Flying is my favorite type – it's finally getting some unique recognition with an all-new kind of battling that's only available to Pokémon that can take to the sky. (Monsters with the Levitate ability get to participate too.) All Sky Battles will be optional events, since players may not have any qualifying monsters in their party when they come across a Sky Trainer. But everybody keeps at least one winged beast in the mix to be able to use Fly, right?

U IS FOR UNDERWATER BATTLES?

The natural counterpart to Flying-only Sky Battles would be Underwater Battles that are open only to Water-type monsters, and an early game trailer hinted briefly at that possibility. This is territory the series has explored before, though, when using the HM move Dive to sink beneath the waves beginning back in Ruby & Sapphire – and on those occasions, all monsters have been valid to use. So, jury's out on this one until the final game release (but I'd personally love to see it happen).

R IS FOR RIDING POKÉMON.

Speaking of improved transportation, X and Y will give us our first chance to actually ride Pokémon! It'll only be in select areas, but it's about time we got to saddle up, don't you think? So far we've seen new monsters Gogoat and Skiddo available as mounts, as well as classic Rock-type Rhyhorn (who can bash boulders out of your way while you're riding). Other likely candidates have to be Fire-type horses Ponyta and Rapidash – just try not to get burned!

T IS FOR TEAM FLARE.

Another staple of the Pokémon series is the presence of some villainous team – because you've got to have some real conflict built into the plot, right? We've previously met Team Rocket, Team Magma, Team Aqua, Team Galactic, Team Plasma and more – that's a lot of organized crime syndicates running around the Pokémon world. Team Flare sets themselves apart with their bold, fiery uniforms (that, and their name, may be a clue that Fire-types will be their preferred Pokémon) and their goal to make the world a better place. Well, that's really been the goal of all the villainous teams, hasn't it? (In their own, illegal ways.)

V IS FOR VISUALS.

We've come a long way since Pokémon's first adventures presented us with a tiny, black-and-white world populated by 8-bit sprites. The striking 3D visuals are what immediately catch your eye in X and Y, and though the 3D's not always stereoscopic (only in battle), the added depth in every scene can't be denied. Look how Bulbasaur, Charmander and Squirtle have "evolved!"

Y IS FOR YVELTAL.

On the other side of Kalos' spectrum (and the other side of this issue), there's Yveltal, the Dark/Flying-type evil bird thing that seems to delight in destruction. I'm a bit torn in my preference between the two, as I've confessed to my love of Flying-types – but I also almost always ally with the "good guys" in games. Which one should I choose? It's a quandary!

W IS FOR WORLDWIDE RELEASE.

A long-running irritation for Pokémon fans around the world throughout the past five generations of the franchise has been the amount of time it takes for localization work to happen – each previous sequel has first launched in Japan, then eventually arrived in other countries after months or even years more time has gone by. Thankfully, Nintendo's now eliminated that problem as well – Pokémon X and Y will go on sale worldwide on the same day, October 12th, 2013. Now we'll finally have the chance to discover each new monster alongside the fans in Japan, instead of playing catch-up after they've already finished the game!

X IS FOR XERNEAS.

The cover monster for Pokémon X (and one of the sides of this issue of NF Magazine), Xerneas is the first-ever legendary Fairy-type. It was the first Fairy-type revealed at all, actually, though we didn't know it at the time way back in January – but it makes perfect sense, as this rainbow-antlered deer is a truly majestic spirit of nature. (Princess Mononoke, anyone?)

Z IS FOR Z VERSION?

And so we arrive at the end of the alphabet, a position that might normally have to be filled with a Zigzagoon or a Zangoose in a Pokémon article like this – except that the naming of X and Y gives us a very strong hint that a third Z Version could be on the way in the future. It's a tradition for Nintendo to take its Pokémon game duos and expand them into trios (except in the case of Black and White, since they got numbered sequels instead of the expected "Grey" edition).

What will happen this time? Hard to say for sure, but a much safer bet is that there will at least be one more legendary monster to compliment Xerneas and Yveltal, and it will have a name that starts with the letter Z and a body that looks like a Z, too. How would that be possible? My money's going on a giant snake, since it would be able to contort its body into a Z formation – for the purposes of posing for promotional art, of course!

THE (NON-POKÉMON) HISTORY OF GAME FREAK

BY TONY PONCE

It's easy to forget that Game Freak has indeed worked on games other than Pokémon. They may not have been as successful, but they at least deserve to be acknowledged for their quirkiness and charm.

GAME DEVELOPMENT BEGINS WITH MENDEL PALACE

Following the release of Nintendo's Famicom – known as the Nintendo Entertainment System in the West – Tajiri sought to learn how the console functioned by breaking it apart and closely studying the individual components. Simply writing about video games was no longer enough for such an inquisitive mind; it was time to take the next step. A few short months after Game Freak was established as a proper game studio, the company produced its very first title: Quinty, published outside of Japan as Mendel Palace. In the vein of classic arcade games, it was a top-down action puzzler in which the goal was to clear each room of all enemies by "flipping" the tiles beneath their feet, sending them hurtling towards the wall. In addition to being Game Freak's video game debut, Mendel Palace was also the professional debut of composer Junichi Masuda, who would likewise gain worldwide recognition through his work on Pokémon.

MARIO & WARIO

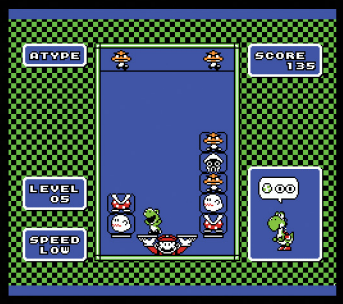
The second Game Freak-developed Mario spin-off was Super Famicom's Mario & Wario, which required the use of the mouse peripheral originally used in Mario Paint. In many ways, the gameplay resembles that of the later Mario vs. Donkey Kong titles – Mario, his vision obscured by a bucket Wario dropped on his head, marches forward automatically, and players must control a fairy who can make platforms appear or reverse Mario's direction by clicking on him. Mario & Wario is one of the rare Mario games that has never seen a Western release in any form, not even on Virtual Console. Despite that, it was referenced in Pokémon Red and Blue when inspecting Copycat's SNES in her home in Saffron City.

1981 1989 1991 1993

GAME FREAK MAGAZINE

Game Freak, Inc. was founded as a video game development company by Satoshi Tajiri in April 1989, but Game Freak's true beginnings were that of a fan-published magazine. In 1981, a teenage Tajiri began writing guides and reviews about the latest arcade games and collecting them in 28-page volumes at ¥300 (roughly $3) a pop. Originally handwritten and manually stapled together, Game Freak built enough of a cult following to attract several contributors. One notable contributor was a young Ken Sugimori, who would become the magazine's illustrator and eventually the art director for the Pokémon franchise. The mag ended its run around 1986, after which Tajiri dedicated himself to learning programming, setting his sights on one day making video games of his own. It's incredible that what started out as an independent gaming publication would later be responsible for one of the most popular franchises on the planet.

How amazing would it be if NF Magazine followed that same track? Hey, it could happen!



YOSHI

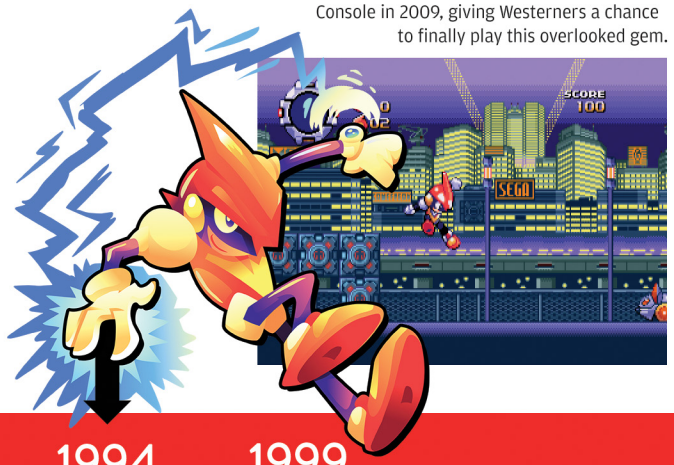
Nintendo took an interest in Game Freak early on, and famed designer Shigeru Miyamoto even became a mentor to Tajiri. Nintendo had enough faith in the fledgling studio to allow the use of the Mario IP for a pair of games! The first was Yoshi, a falling block puzzler for NES and Game Boy that tasked players with clearing stacks of Mario series grunts like Boos and Goombas before they reach the top of the screen. The most effective way to accomplish this was to sandwich enemies between two open Yoshi eggshells; the bigger the stack, the bigger the Yoshi hatchling and, in turn, the score bonus. An interesting premise, but sadly a rather average entry in the genre.

SMART BALL

Game Freak jumped from NES to SNES for Smart Ball, a fairly standard yet super-cute side-scrolling platformer about a young prince who gets transformed into a blob by a wizard at the behest of his jealous brother. In this form, he can attack enemies by squashing and stretching his body, scale walls by sticking to their surface and travel through narrow pipes connecting various rooms. In Japan, the game was called Jerry Boy; considering the gelatinous nature of the hero, and that the phonetic sounds of "R" and "L" in Japanese are interchangeable, it's no coincidence that the name can also be interpreted as "Jelly Boy." (Interestingly, an unrelated SNES/Game Boy game called Jelly Boy was released exclusively in Europe years later.) Of curiously fascinating note is that Smart Ball was among a collection of titles published by Sony for Nintendo platforms prior to the launch of the PlayStation. A Smart Ball sequel was in development for SNES, but Sony canceled the project – likely due to its plans to enter the home console market.

PULSEMAN

Of the four Game Freak titles released on non-Nintendo platforms (all of which were Japan-exclusive), Pulseman for Mega Drive is easily the most famous. The protagonist is a half-human, half-A.I. boy who can travel between the real and digital worlds, battling crime with his electricity powers. Several aspects were later referenced in Pokémon – Diamond and Pearl's Team Galactic was named after Pulseman's Galaxy Gang, and Volt Tackle, especially the variant used as Pikachu's Final Smash in Super Smash Bros. Brawl, was based upon Pulseman's signature move, "Voltekka." Pulseman appeared on Wii Virtual Console in 2009, giving Westerners a chance to finally play this overlooked gem.



HARMOKNIGHT

Following the release of Drill Dozer, Game Freak's focus shifted entirely towards Pokémon, at the expense of further original IPs. After years of nothing but more Pikachu, though, the management wanted to provide its staff opportunities to flex their creativity – thus, an initiative that greatly resembled Google's "Innovation Time Off" was instated. This new policy allows anyone in the company to work on a new game if they can gain the support of at least two other people. After two three-month evaluation periods, management would hopefully give the project an official go-ahead. The first fruit born of that policy was HarmoKnight, conceived by English Game Freak designer James Turner. It's a 3DS eShop rhythm platformer with similar gameplay to Bit.Trip Runner and an art style highly reminiscent of PlayStation 2's Gitaroo Man. You have to collect as many notes in a level as possible while swinging your musical staff to smack baddies and percussion plants in time with the beat. Our full review appeared in NF Magazine Issue #3 – it was so great we gave it an 8!

1994 1999 2005 2012

CLICK MEDIC

Click Medic was the second Sony-published Game Freak game, and the last to appear on a non-Nintendo system. Combining elements of the visual novel, medical simulation and real-time strategy genres, Click Medic is also the most bizarre product in the entire Game Freak catalog. In order to diagnose an illness, you'd climb aboard the Virtual Body Machine, a spacecraft-like vessel that gets shrunk to microscopic level to allow entry into a patient's body. Once inside, you'd navigate your path by selecting keywords from text prompts, and eventually you'd engage a virus by deploying antibodies. As Click Medic was released after Pokémon had become a phenomenon, you can imagine players were quite surprised to discover Sugimori's distinctive character designs turn up on the PlayStation of all places.

DRILL DOZER

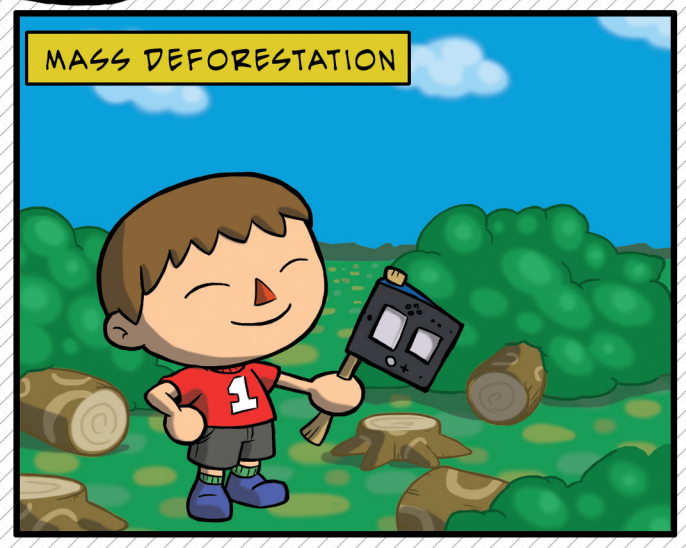
It would be more than six years before Game Freak once again ventured outside of Pokémon, but at least the long wait resulted in one of the most fun and inventive platformers in the Game Boy Advance library. Drill Dozer stars Jill, an adorable bandit girl in an equally adorable mech suit that can drill through almost anything – fans of the anime Gurren Lagann could easily draw comparisons between that show's Simon and Drill Dozer's pink-haired starlet. The dozer's drill serves a wide variety of purposes, including breaking through enemies, digging through walls, tunneling underground, turning cranks and launching into a super jump. The game cartridge even came equipped with built-in force feedback so that players could feel every rumbling sensation. However, none of these clever features led to strong sales. Jill was not completely forgotten within the walls of Nintendo, though, as she and her dozer later appeared as an Assist Trophy in Super Smash Bros. Brawl.

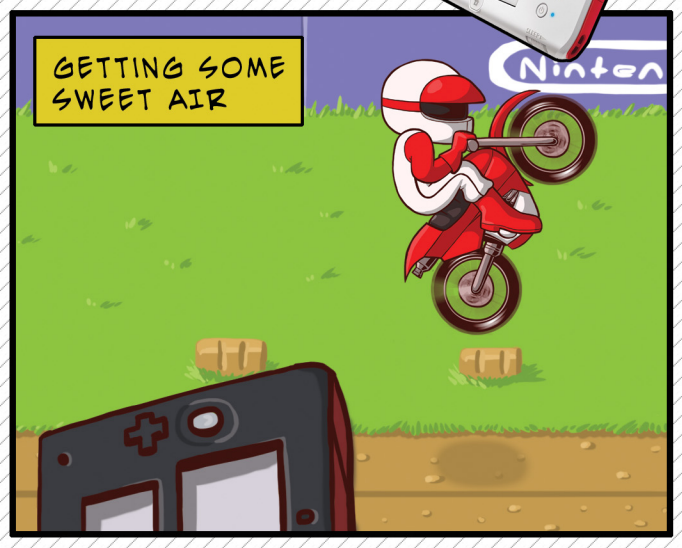
THE FUTURE

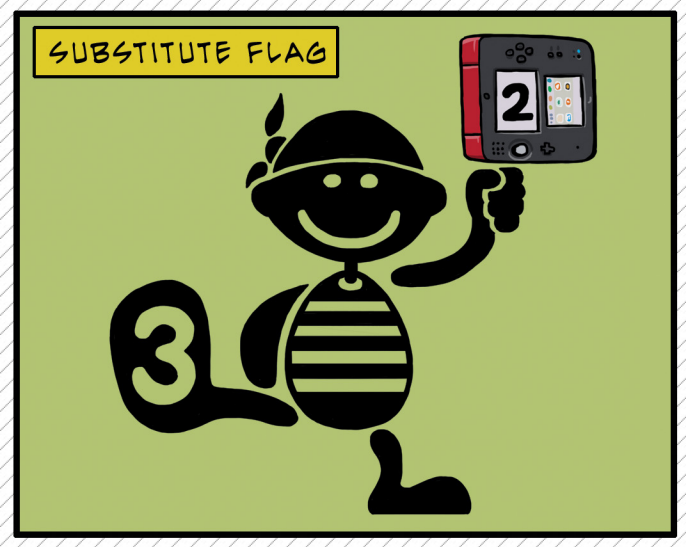
Released in Japan at the end of July, Soriti Horse was the second project to emerge out of Game Freak's new development policy. In this unusual genre mash-up, you play solitaire in order to build your relationship with your horse, then compete in races using the touch screen to navigate the track. And would you believe that this is the company's first self-published title ever? No word yet on a Western localization, but it wouldn't be out of place among the myriad experimental 3DS eShop offerings. This expanded creative freedom has the potential for further fresh experiences, though it's doubtful anyone would complain if Game Freak used that freedom to revisit some older titles that deserve a second lease on life!

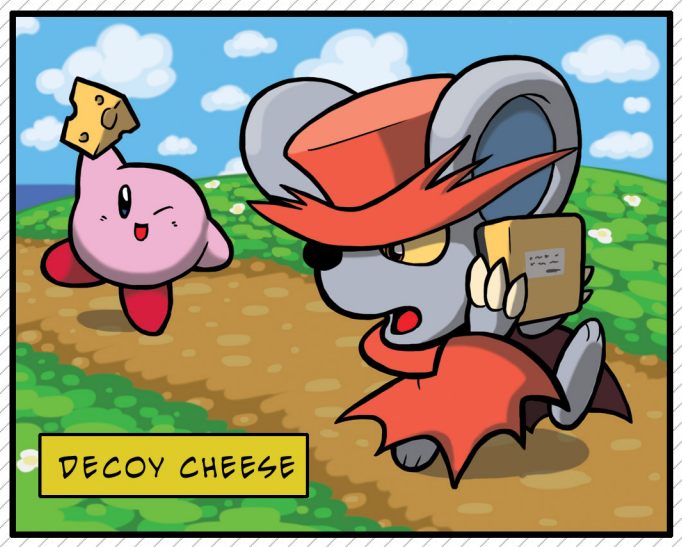
ILLUSTRATIONS BY LINDSEY LAYNE KING

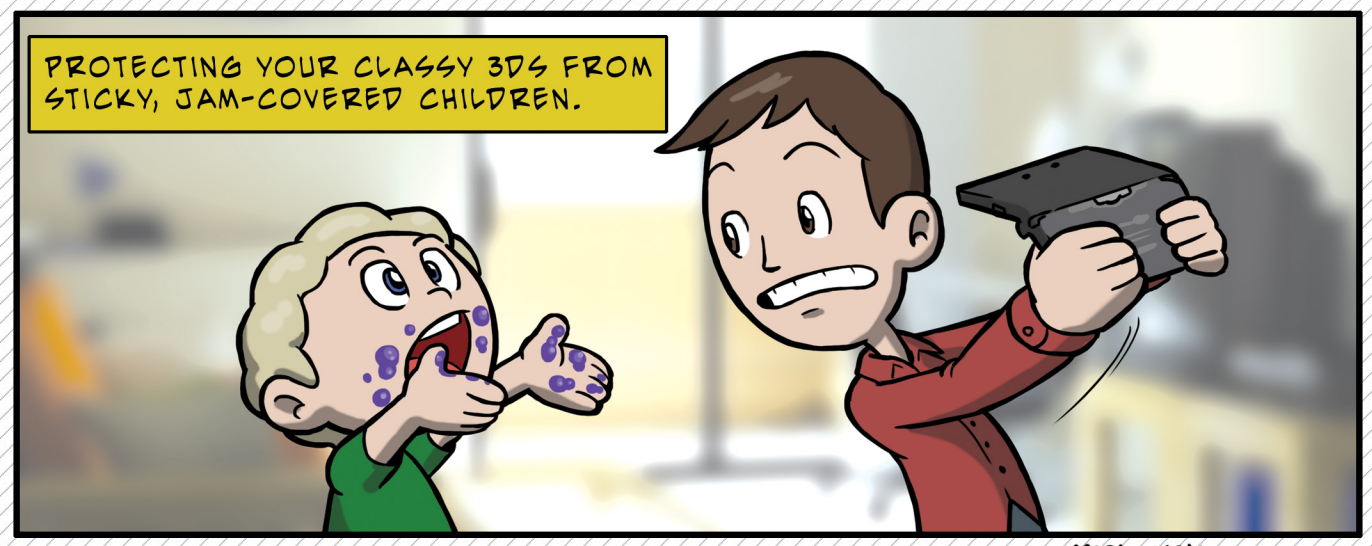
5 REASONS TO OWN A NINTENDO 2DS™











MARK KELLY 2013

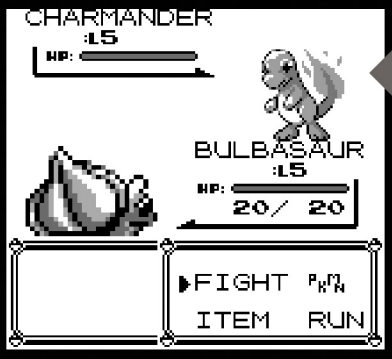
MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A SHINY POKÉMON

POKÉMON SAPPHIRE
GAME BOY ADVANCE,
2003

Few moments can get a Pokémon player's heart beating faster than when a "Shiny" appears on-screen – finding these rare, alternate-colored creatures happens entirely by chance, and they're so infrequent that many long-time trainers have still never witnessed one themselves. I had the good fortune to encounter my first Shiny during my time playing Pokémon Sapphire, though I was caught almost entirely unprepared – I had a team that was ill-equipped for capture duty and only a handful of Poké Balls to use in trying make the rare green Golbat mine.

After exhausting nearly every resource, I finally, desperately threw one of the last Balls in my trainer bag – a Dive Ball (the kind meant for catching Water-types). But somehow, some way, it worked! Now, years later, I have a bold pink Crobat as the leader of my team, and she still splashes onto the battlefield with a Dive Ball's water effect every time. "Go, Crobat! I choose you!" (splash) – LUCAS

THEN



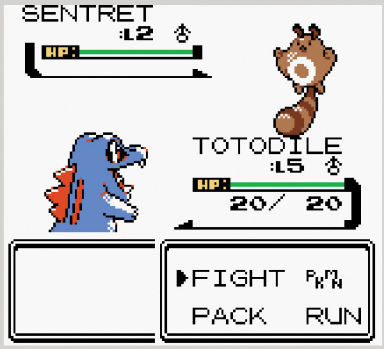
THE POKÉMON SERIES made its American debut in 1998 with Pokémon Red and Blue, two role-playing games released near the tail end of the Game Boy's life cycle. Developed by a little studio called Game Freak and inspired by designer Satoshi Tajiri's childhood memories, the pair put players in the role of an aspiring Pokémon trainer, a kid who'd travel around the world catching monsters and battling other, strong trainers called Gym Leaders to become the Pokémon League Champion.

The games themselves were fairly standard RPGs, featuring the same turn-based combat and leveling system typically associated with the genre. But what made them so endearing to a legion of gamers the world over was their premise. Rather than giving players control of a predetermined cast of characters, they were able to create their own parties by "catching" Pokémon, replicating Tajiri's experience of capturing bugs as a child. The Pokémon themselves were also varied and charming, with 151 different species to collect, ranging from cute little rodents to ferocious dragons.

The setting, too, was a big part of the games' appeal. Unlike most RPGs of the time, which oscillated between fantasy and sci-fi settings, Pokémon featured a fairly modern world to explore, making the adventure much more relatable to children.

Of course, what really made the titles so engaging was the depth hidden below their surface. Each monster in the game was assigned a certain type – elemental affinities like Water, Fire, Grass, et cetera. Each type had its own set of weaknesses, giving combat a surprisingly deep layer of strategy. Grass Pokémon would fare poorly against Fire ones, but would easily defeat Water-types, and so on, making battles akin to a game of chess.

With all these elements working in their favor, it's easy to see why Pokémon Red and Blue became such an immediate phenomenon, selling nearly 10 million copies in the US alone. But while the games were instant classics upon their release, they were just the foundation for greater things still to come.



FOR ITS FIRST Poké-sequels, Game Freak took everything that had made Red and Blue such an unprecedented success and expanded it to new heights. The resulting games, Pokémon Gold and Silver, felt like a natural continuation of the series, taking players to an exotic new region – Johto – with eight new Gym Leaders to challenge and 100 new Pokémon to find and tame.

But while the core adventure stuck closely to the template laid down by Red and Blue, Gold and Silver also introduced a host of mechanical changes to the gameplay, making them a much deeper experience than their predecessors. This time around, players could equip their critters with special held items, which ranged from restoratives like berries to stat-boosting items like the Blackglasses, adding a new layer of depth to battles. The games also introduced two new Pokémon types, Dark and Steel, further balancing out the gameplay. Lastly, the pair were able to incorporate a day and night system thanks to their built-in battery and clock, allowing days to elapse in real time. With this feature, certain Pokémon would only appear during specific hours of the day, making Johto feel like a living world in the palm of your hands.

But perhaps the greatest thing about Pokémon Gold and Silver was the sheer scale of the adventure. Once trainers conquered the games' new Gym Leaders and challenged the Elite Four, they were given a ticket to board the S.S. Aqua, which allowed them to travel back to Kanto, the setting of the first two Pokémon titles. There they could battle the original eight Gym Leaders and witness how the region had changed in the years since Team Rocket's defeat. And when they finally completed their badge collection, they got to ascend Mt. Silver and face off against Red, the player character from Red and Blue, in what is still one of the most challenging battles in the series.

Future games would expand on Gold and Silver's innovations in their own ways, but none would have as big of an impact on the course of the franchise.

WHILE POKÉMON GOLD and Silver represented a huge step forward for the franchise in terms of ambition and scope, their follow-ups, Ruby and Sapphire, which were released for the Game Boy Advance in 2003, introduced more subtle changes to the series. Sure, the visuals received a nice upgrade thanks to the GBA's extra horsepower, allowing for some neat flourishes like weather effects and more detailed battle animations. But in general, the majority of these games' innovations took place beneath their surface, making the third generation one of refinement.

Once again, players were dropped into an entirely new setting – this time the island region of Hoenn, which featured its own cast of Gym Leaders to defeat and Pokémon to collect. Unlike previous games, however, the storyline would differ slightly depending on which version of the game players chose: in Ruby, they were tasked with protecting Hoenn from Team Magma, a group of environmental extremists who sought to expand the world's landmass by awakening the legendary Groudon; in Sapphire, they'd have to thwart the plans of Team Aqua, who looked to flood the region by summoning Kyogre. Each version featured the same underlying quest, but the different narrative wrinkles gave each title its own distinct feel.

Like Gold and Silver, Ruby and Sapphire did not look all that different from their predecessors at an outward glance, but their mechanics received a dramatic overhaul. Most notably, the games were the first to introduce EVs and IVs (Effort Values and Individual Values) to the series, establishing the foundation for all future Pokémon titles. The pair also brought Natures and Abilities to the mix, adding another layer of depth to battles, and giving each Pokémon a unique passive trait in combat.

Beyond that, Ruby and Sapphire introduced a handful of other features that would later become staples of the series. For the first time in Pokémon history, players could now engage in double battles, completely changing the dynamic of combat. And when they grew weary of battling, players could take part in Contests, the Pokémon equivalent of dog shows. Together, these new elements helped push the series forward in subtle, but nevertheless important, ways.

BY KEVIN KNEZEVIC

POKÉMON MADE THE jump to the Nintendo DS in 2007 with the release of Diamond and Pearl, the first new Pokémon titles in four years. Rather than continuing to expand the series in new directions, Diamond and Pearl were largely iterative in their design, synthesizing past innovations into one adventure.

This time around, the games took players to the region of Sinnoh, a mountainous land far north of Johto and Kanto. Like other settings in the Pokémon world, Sinnoh was besieged by its own villainous team, Team Galactic, who sought to harness the time- and space-controlling powers of Dialga and Palkia to create a new universe.

While the games expanded the series' mythology into more cosmic territory, the most striking thing about Diamond and Pearl was their visuals. The pair took advantage of the stronger DS hardware to produce quasi-3D environments, giving Sinnoh a distinct look and feel compared to previous regions in the series. The titles also reprised the day and night system from Gold and Silver, adding a few more hourly hues to the mix to make the transition between daytime and nighttime much smoother.

Diamond and Pearl's biggest innovation, however, came in the form of improved communication features. For the first time in the series, players could connect to one another via Wi-Fi, enabling them to battle and trade with other trainers around the world. They could also team up with other gamers using the DS system's local wireless capabilities to explore the Sinnoh Underground, a vast, labyrinthine network of tunnels below the region's surface. Here, players could set up hidden bases and play games like Capture the Flag with others in the vicinity, offering a fun respite from the usual gameplay.

Of course, even if you didn't have anyone around to spelunk with, the Underground offered solo players plenty to do in the form of mining, a mini-game that allowed you to excavate rare items using the DS touch screen. The Underground would ultimately be relegated to Diamond and Pearl (and their eventual follow-up Platinum), making it a one-off feature for the series, but the games' other innovations would continue to be refined in later installments, leaving their own mark on the franchise.

NOW

WHILE DIAMOND AND Pearl represented a culmination of the series' past experiments, their 2011 follow-ups, Black and White, came as a sort of reboot. The pair still featured the same eight-gym formula that had become synonymous with the franchise, but Game Freak took great pains to distance the titles from their predecessors, setting them in the decidedly modern region of Unova (the first Pokémon backdrop not based upon a region in Japan), resetting the Route count and populating the world exclusively with new monsters.

This all made Black and White the most exotic pair of Pokémon games since, arguably, Gold and Silver. With no familiar monsters to catch and an entirely new world to explore, veteran players got to experience the adventure as if for the first time. Of course, it also helped that Unova was one of the most varied regions the series had ever seen, featuring a wide array of new environments, from sprawling metropolitan cities to sandswept ruins to even a village nestled atop an ancient stone bridge.

As stunning as the setting was, Black and White also staked new ground with their narrative, which explored themes outside the series' usual comfort zone. The antagonists this time were Team Plasma, a group of radicals who traveled around the region extolling the virtues of releasing Pokémon from their captivity. It was a unique subversion of the traditional Pokémon story, calling attention to the morality behind the series' premise. The execution may have been a little heavy-handed, but the underlying message certainly gave the tale an interesting philosophical bent that other Pokémon games have lacked.

Like Diamond and Pearl, Black and White's primary gameplay innovations came in the form of improved wireless functions. Players could now synch their games up to the Pokémon Global Link, a special web site that enabled them to take part in Wi-Fi competitions and enter the Dream World, where they could furnish a virtual home, cultivate a berry garden and befriend rare Pokémon, many of which with Abilities not available through normal play. The games also upped the ante with a seasonal cycle and new Triple and Rotation Battles, allowing trainers to send three monsters onto the field at once for even more complex battles.

In hindsight, this fifth generation also has the distinction of having the final games in the series to use 2D art.

WE'RE NOW STANDING on the cusp of a new generation of Pokémon titles, and by the looks of it, they'll be the most radical ones yet. Everything Nintendo has revealed about Pokémon X and Y has illustrated just how far the series has come since its humble Game Boy origins: the visuals have finally made the leap to three dimensions, with beautifully rendered character models and a vast, gorgeous world serving as their backdrop; online interactions have been greatly expanded, with a Player Search System allowing gamers to quickly and easily connect to other trainers; and even more wrinkles have been added to the battle system, with new Sky Battles and Horde Encounters offering another twist on the usual Pokémon gameplay.

But once again, the most interesting things about X and Y are all the mechanical changes being enacted. For the first time since Gold and Silver, Game Freak will be adding a new Pokémon type to the series – Fairy. Just as the Dark and Steel types were introduced to counteract Psychic Pokemon, the new Fairy-type will help balance out Dragons, which have dethroned Psychics as the most dominant type in the series. Fairies will also come with their own set of weaknesses, giving some underused types like Poison a chance to finally shine.

Moreover, X and Y will be introducing Mega Evolutions to the series. Unlike regular evolutions, which only occur after a Pokémon has achieved a certain level, Mega Evolutions are initiated at the start of a battle thanks to equippable Mega Stones. These new monsters differ greatly from their standard forms, boasting improved stats and, often, new types and Abilities (not to mention a cool new look), making them a formidable addition to the series.

That's not to say that X and Y will be completely abandoning their roots, though; Game Freak will also be paying tribute to the series' origins by letting players start this new adventure off with one of the Generation I Starters (in addition to Chespin, Fennekin or Froakie).

And that's only scratching the surface of what X and Y have to offer. You can read more about the titles in "The ABC's of Pokémon X & Y" (Page 36), but suffice it to say, the franchise has never looked brighter. With so many new elements being added to the gameplay, Pokémon fans will have a lot to look forward to in this new era!

FIRST APPEARANCE:
POKÉMON RED & BLUE,
GAME BOY, 1998

MEWTWO

Millions of Pokémon Trainers fought through Cerulean Cave to find and confront this intimidating foe over 15 years ago. Today, he's still an imposing force.

HIGHLIGHT REEL

Pokémon Red & Blue
Game Boy, 1998

As the original final Pokémon (the last in the numbered list, at #150), capturing Mewtwo served as an end goal for the series' first games. It turns out he wasn't the last, though, as it was revealed that he was the result of a cloning experiment – his progenitor? Mew, #151.

Pokémon Stadium
N64, 2000

Though his status as the last in the numerical listing didn't last long, Mewtwo maintained his role as the "final boss" of the greater Pokémon series for several years. His grandeur was celebrated most in 2000's Pokémon Stadium, as it was possible to unlock a game mode dedicated to fighting just him – "Vs. Mewtwo." (Though a rented, exploding Electrode could humble him.)

Super Smash Bros. Melee
GameCube, 2001

The Pokémon series moved on to Gold and Silver's Generation II, and Mewtwo seemed to be left behind a bit – he didn't play much of a role in those sequels. But just when we thought his star was fading, he got called up to the biggest spot a Nintendo character can step into – playable status in a Super Smash Bros. game. His Psychic-type power sent opponents flying!

Pokémon X & Y
3DS, 2013

It's now been over a decade since Mewtwo was last truly in the spotlight, as after that star turn in Melee he was unceremoniously dumped from the roster for 2008's Super Smash Bros. Brawl. (Replaced by Lucario, wouldn't you know.) Pokémon X and Y are bringing him back with a vengeance, though – no other Gen. I 'mon has been featured as prominently as him in these Gen. VI games, and no other creature boasts two different Mega Evolutions. (So far.)

CHALLENGER APPROACHING?

THE TIMING JUST couldn't be better. For over five years now, Super Smash Bros. and Pokémon fans alike have been crying foul – Mewtwo was a fan-favorite fighter in Super Smash Bros. Melee, and to have him removed from the playable roster in Super Smash Bros. Brawl was a major disappointment. With two Smash games in development now, though, there's a chance for Masahiro Sakurai and his team to right this wrong.

And, seriously, the timing could not be better. Mewtwo has been the focus of a ton of Nintendo's promotional efforts for the new X and Y games for six months straight now – directly overlapping the full reveal of Super Smash Bros. for Wii U and 3DS. Fans – especially young ones who weren't even born yet back when Red and Blue first made him the focus of so much fear and respect – are now more aware of this monster than almost any other from the original cast of 151.

And even better than great fan awareness is great gameplay potential. The two new Mega Evolution forms Mewtwo has gained could factor directly into his Super Smash moveset – he could either adopt the ability to switch back and forth between looks (like Zelda/Sheik or the Pokémon Trainer in Brawl), or else he could maintain his original form and switch into X or Y mode only for his Final Smash attack. (Since he missed being in Brawl, he was never assigned a Final Smash.)

Lucario, in many people's minds, took Mewtwo's spot in the Brawl roster. But how cool would it be to have them both together, facing off in a Pokémon grudge match on Final Destination? It would be an epic battle for Poké-supremacy, and it makes even more sense when you consider that Lucario, too, has been given a new Mega Evolution form. (Nintendo's even hyped this showdown with official X and Y art! I mean, look at that fight! Who wouldn't want that in Smash?)

I make a lot of Super Smash Bros. predictions, and I like to think that I have a pretty good track record of gauging what will and won't happen in each new game – I'm putting my money on Mewtwo making a comeback. He'll be the first lapsed veteran to return, and, when he does, he'll be angry.

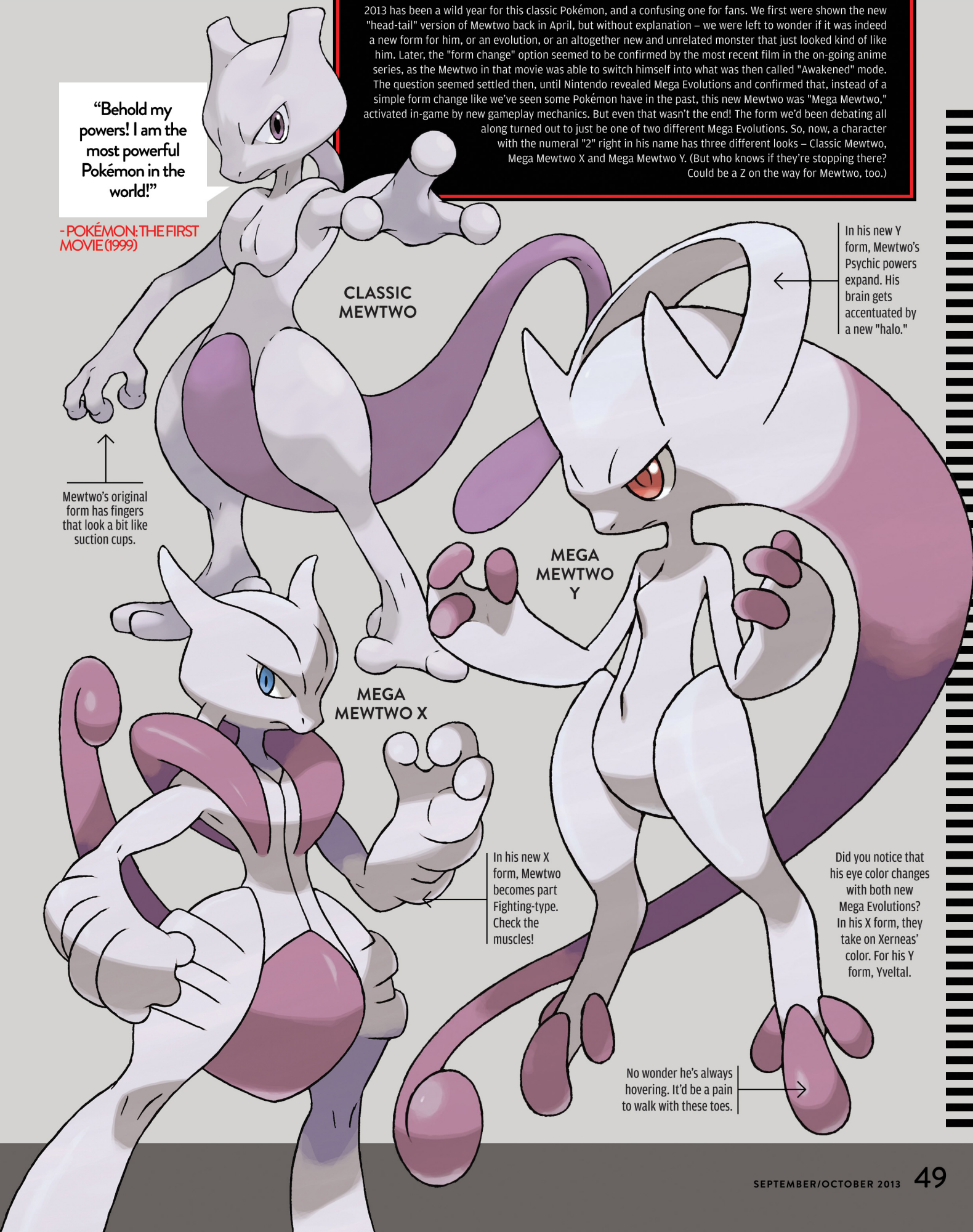
BY LUCAS M. THOMAS

MEWTWO TIMES THREE

2013 has been a wild year for this classic Pokémon, and a confusing one for fans. We first were shown the new "head-tail" version of Mewtwo back in April, but without explanation – we were left to wonder if it was indeed a new form for him, or an evolution, or an altogether new and unrelated monster that just looked kind of like him. Later, the "form change" option seemed to be confirmed by the most recent film in the on-going anime series, as the Mewtwo in that movie was able to switch himself into what was then called "Awakened" mode. The question seemed settled then, until Nintendo revealed Mega Evolutions and confirmed that, instead of a simple form change like we've seen some Pokémon have in the past, this new Mewtwo was "Mega Mewtwo," activated in-game by new gameplay mechanics. But even that wasn't the end! The form we'd been debating all along turned out to just be one of two different Mega Evolutions. So, now, a character with the numeral "2" right in his name has three different looks – Classic Mewtwo, Mega Mewtwo X and Mega Mewtwo Y. (But who knows if they're stopping there? Could be a Z on the way for Mewtwo, too.)

"Behold my powers! I am the most powerful Pokémon in the world!"

- POKÉMON: THE FIRST MOVIE (1999)



F-ZERO: AN ODE TO THE X CUP

BUTT ROCK SOUNDTRACKS and futuristic racing games aren't things you see around too often these days. Just over 15 years ago, though, Nintendo released what might be the best entry in one of gaming's defining futuristic racing series: F-Zero X. The 1998 Nintendo 64 release was technically the third entry in the series, following the launch-day Super Nintendo original and its Japan-only Satellaview sequel.

F-Zero X contains two of the most awesome racing modes ever, with the randomly generated X Cup and the frenzied, madcap Death Race. X Cup is a delightfully absurd multiplayer experience. Grouping together four players is something magical, especially as you encounter short races that take place entirely in tubes that might spit an unsuspecting racer out right over the edge of flat track. And then there are the 90-degree turns. Unless you pay careful attention to the curves of the track, you and your friends might be fooled by the sadistic tight turns that, if you're going too fast, will send you right over an unguarded edge. X Cup is pure insanity. I have yet to see matched it in another racing game (not even F-Zero GX, which is detailed a bit in the sidebar).

Death Race is similarly crazy, as you begin in 30th place and must work your way up to the front in an endless straightaway with one goal in mind: destroy every other racer. It's an odd time trial, since the only marker for success is completing the task in a quick amount of time. Death Race tests a different part of the player's skill. It's not about speed – it's about carnage. It might not quite be Twisted Metal, but there is something wondrous about timing a spin to send a rival car careening over the edge to certain doom.

In general, F-Zero X was mostly a marvel for its time. With 30 racers on on the screen at once, it still ran at a constant framerate. Sure, the graphics were blockier than most, but that no-nonsense approach to making sure the game ran well has helped it to still be playable here in 2013. Looking back at most games from 1998, especially racers, they aren't exactly the most aesthetically pleasant experiences.

Let's put it this way – there's a reason why Ocarina of Time 3D screens are the ones used in the Zelda symphony concerts. (It's because the original N64 game looks rough.)

In a Nintendo 64 world of Mario Kart and Diddy Kong Racing, F-Zero X, specifically the X Cup and Death Race, hold up to the test of time. It's a shame that outside of an appearance in Nintendo Land, the F-Zero series appears to be on perpetual hold. Shigeru Miyamoto even commented to IGN during E3 2013 that he doesn't even know what to do or where to go with a new F-Zero game.

Aside from the man who stands behind iterative Mario Kart racing games saying F-Zero has nothing left in the tank, the series' mainline death can be attributed to how poorly the spin-off anime – F-Zero: GP Legend – and subsequent Game Boy Advance games fared. The anime starred a newly created character, lasted just one year (from 2003 to 2004), and the two games that came out of it bombed so horribly that the second one never left Japan.

Those Game Boy Advance sequels weren't poorly received – the small amount of people who played F-Zero: GP Legend and F-Zero: Climax enjoyed them. It's just that no one bought them, as evidenced by the fact that I was able to buy a brand-new copy of GP Legend last year for $5.

Even F-Zero GX, which is a beloved GameCube title, sold less than the SNES and Nintendo 64 versions did. That's nearly a travesty.

It's sad that the F-Zero series has now been relegated to nothing but occasional character and vehicle references in Super Smash Bros., Animal Crossing and Nintendo Land, but, unfortunately, that might be the best we're ever going to get again. I'll cross my fingers that Captain Falcon will get to show his racing moves another time, but at the very least, we will always have the X Cup.

We'll always have our winding turns, randomly generated and running at a nice framerate with blocky, fast-moving cars.

We'll always have the unadulterated glory of Death Race.

We'll always have our random, disaster-causing 90-degree turns with no walls.

Happy 15th anniversary to you, F-Zero X. – **NEAL**

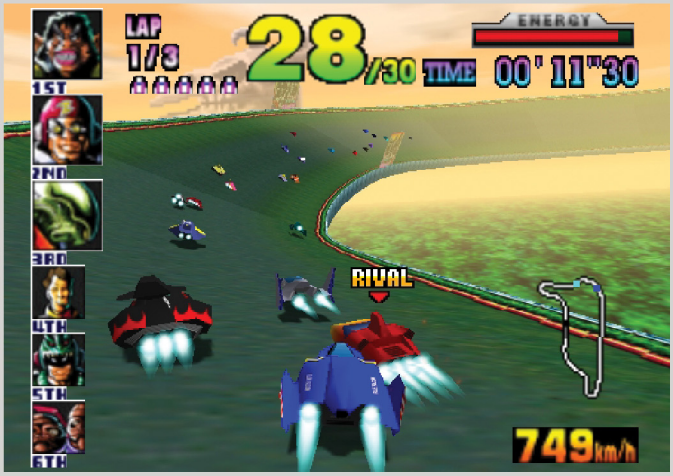
GX TURNS 10

F-Zero GX, the 2003 GameCube release developed by Sega's Amusement Visions team (headed up by current Sega Chief Creative Officer Toshihiro Nagoshi who more recently worked on the Yakuza series), had some neat and notable features aside from its blisteringly fast racing and devilish challenge. Those notable features all spawn from the game's arcade counterpart, F-Zero AX.

F-Zero AX had exclusive racers and tracks, and players could even print out an F-Zero license that could be used to upgrade their custom vehicle in arcade units and upload their fastest times to online rankings. (Some of the arcade machines were even designed after Captain Falcon's Blue Falcon and featured tilting seats.)

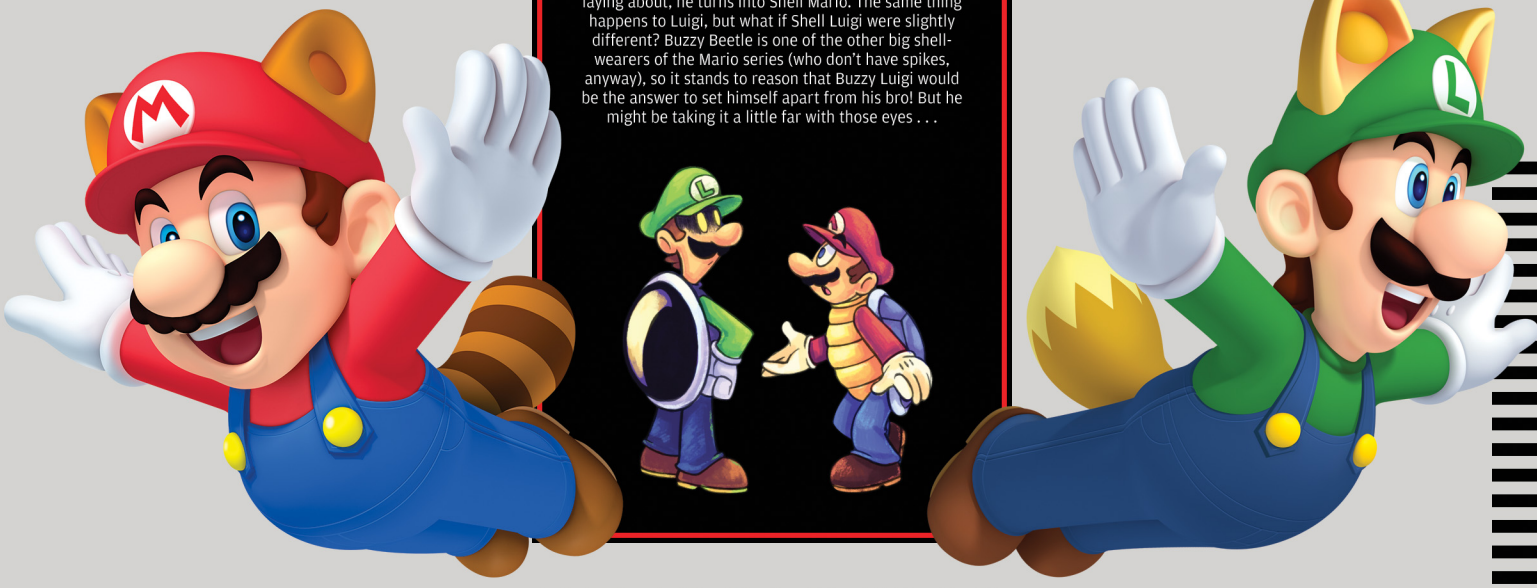
If you brought your GameCube memory card to an F-Zero AX machine, you would unlock the final cup in GX, as well a variety of vehicles and custom parts. Now, it's been 10 years since the F-Zero GX/AX's release – so finding one of these arcade machines is a tall order (as of 2011, there was still one in Canada's Wonderland in Toronto, for your information), but you can unlock the extra content in GX by completing arduous tasks. Or you can use a cheat device and unlock them. Heck, nearly all of F-Zero AX is on the F-Zero GX disc, as hackers have discovered in the past few years.

While F-Zero GX was the last home console F-Zero game, the series certainly went out with a bang. It's a bummer it didn't succeed well enough!



RETCONNING LUIGI'S POWER-UPS

In recent years, Luigi's been given his own look when powering up – he's no longer just been cloning Mario's style. He gains the features of a fox instead of a raccoon when grabbing a Super Leaf. He goes silver all over when touching a Gold Flower. He's even set to unleash a leopard look when he snags a Cat Bell in the upcoming Super Mario 3D World! But what if we took these modern examples of Luigi's individuality and used them as inspiration to rewrite the past? Here's what five older power-ups might have made Luigi look like, if he'd stepped out of his brother's shadow sooner.



BUZZY LUIGI

When Mario grabs a blue Koopa Troopa shell he found laying about, he turns into Shell Mario. The same thing happens to Luigi, but what if Shell Luigi were slightly different? Buzzy Beetle is one of the other big shell-wearers of the Mario series (who don't have spikes, anyway), so it stands to reason that Buzzy Luigi would be the answer to set himself apart from his bro! But he might be taking it a little far with those eyes . . .

BAT LUIGI

In his Super NES adventure, Mario truly became "Super" when he donned a cape and took to the skies like a certain man of steel. But what if Luigi took a different approach when he powers up? Koopas are a superstitious, cowardly lot, so what better way to strike fear into their hearts than as Bat Luigi? Together, he and his brother could be known as "Super Mario World's Finest!"

YO-YO LUIGI

When Mario set out to rescue Princess Daisy in Sarasaland, the flowers he found there armed him with a powered-up version of a childhood favorite, the bouncing Superball! But what if, when Luigi takes hold of the flora of his girlfriend's kingdom, he took another classic from the toy box? Yo-Yo Luigi hurls the axle to nab coins and foil foes, and in a snap of the wrist, it's back!

SEAL LUIGI

New Super Mario Bros. Wii introduced two new power-ups, including the Penguin Suit. The one who dons this cute-but-dangerous attire is able to throw ice balls, swim with the greatest of ease, maintain their footing on slippery surfaces and slide across the ice and straight through enemies on their belly. But for Luigi, who is striving to be different, that isn't enough. Sure, Seal Luigi might have all the same powers of a Penguin Suit, but how would he run around in that thing? "Hey fellas! Wait for me, Luigi!"

AXOLOTL LUIGI

Oh Luigi, you so crazy. While your brother is content to dive beneath the waves as nothing more than a simple frog, you had to be different, and what has that gotten us? Axolotl Luigi, derived from the "water monster" that's also known as the Mexican walking fish. Sure, you have your individuality, and certainly, you'll be able to outswim everything from Cheep Cheeps to Bloopers, but at what cost, man? *At what cost?!* One word of advice: Don't try stand-up comedy in this outfit.

BY DAVID OXFORD ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOBY BARRETT (LINE ART) & LINDSEY LAYNE KING (COLORING)

IT'S NEW TO ME!
EARTHBOUND

We know that long-time Nintendo fans have been jumping for joy since Ness and his friends have reappeared by way of the Wii U eShop – but what do fresh eyes see?

ORIGINAL RELEASE: SNES, JUNE 1995
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPERS: APE / HAL LABORATORY

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED to play this. EarthBound! The legendary RPG! The original game of that curiously strong kid Ness in Super Smash Bros. Its reputation precedes it by a mile, and yet if you asked many gamers from my generation to tell you just what EarthBound is, you'd be likely to get a response along the lines of:

"Uh, what are you talking about?"

It's odd how a game can at once be so well known and so unknown, at the time. But I personally am shamed that I'd let it fall through the cracks and never played it myself, so I was absolutely looking forward to righting that wrong.

It was weird from the start. When I started playing, I didn't quite know how to take it all in – alien flies, wimpy guys, all while staring down crow's and snake's eyes (oh my!). It felt like a bit of a mixed start to me, but, really, the whole game felt that way.

As I proceeded through the game I fought gangs, living plants, aliens, robots, cultists and discontented civilians. While the enemies, for the most part, seemed powerful (with dark undertones), Ness remains very much a kid. What weapons does he arm himself with against enemies of such strength? Baseball bats primarily, and he has the use of his PSI powers.

The soundtrack and story of EarthBound remind me an '80s sci-fi flick. The artwork is a bit like a softer, lighter-colored Pokemon. EarthBound streamlines some parts of the RPG experience, asking if you want to sell a weapon after you have purchased a stronger version – but it makes other parts more clunky than the usual RPG, like when you have to open a menu just to talk to someone. Altogether you end up with one very weird game!

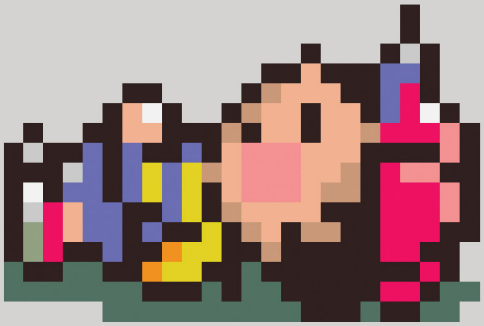
EarthBound can easily turn into a toilsome grind, however. As you move forward in the story, sometimes you end up walking around a town or city for half an hour just trying to find the right person to talk to, or the right object to interact with. Battles are generally uncreative as well, as they play out with you using the same actions over and over again, barely changing in tactics – and leveling up gives you no satisfaction.

The bottom line is that the game play is unimpressive, repetitive and usually frustrating. Fortunately, that isn't where EarthBound shines.

This is a game that excels at drawing you in with its art, dialogue and story. Though the whole game feels like it's a tossed-together mixture of mismatched adult concepts such as enraged drug users attacking you, cults controlling peoples minds and Earth being invaded by aliens, it brings it all of the oddities together with a fantastic, child-like presentation. The whole game has an innocent feel.

This feeling allows you to proceed through this game enjoying the adventure, without getting bogged down by the politics of the enemies – something you rarely see in today's games. Also, after investing so many long hours of gameplay, there's an incredible sense of achievement once you defeat a boss. Even though you've done practically nothing!

Most of the time, this game is just frustrating. But if you let yourself enjoy the events of EarthBound without focusing on what you're actually doing, it can be an extremely fun game! – **TEAGAN**



SO, WHO'S RIGHT?

Earlier in this issue, you got the chance to read Matthew's impassioned, overwhelming positive review of EarthBound's re-release through the Wii U Virtual Console service. He declared his fandom proudly, all while asserting that any gamer would adore Ness, Paula, Jeff and Poo's adventure whether they remembered it from the '90s or were approaching it for the very first time today. Teagan, however (who wasn't yet born when EarthBound was first released), has put forth his opinion as a young gamer, and he wasn't so convinced. So, who's right? Is it just nostalgia that's keeping EarthBound's positive profile alive, or is it truly a masterpiece? We've presented two different perspectives, and now we invite you to contribute yours. Write in by email, tweet or Facebook message to let us know your personal opinion on EarthBound, and we'll print some of the best responses in our next issue!

– **LUCAS**

WARP ZONE

What Nintendo Power was writing about way back when.

ISSUE #2: SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1988

THOUGH THE FIRST issue of Nintendo Power was a smashing success, its immediate follow-up was something of a nightmare for all those involved – readers and staff alike! Castlevania II took the cover, and though the game was subtitled Simon's Quest, it was Dracula's Curse that would be felt as younger readers found themselves traumatized by the decapitated Lord of Darkness staring at them from the heroic Belmont's grasp on the cover. As for the NP Crew circa 1988, they too found themselves traumatized – by the sheer number of angry phone calls and letters from those children's parents!

Looking past the cover, however, would reveal more of the same great coverage which helped kick things off in the magazine's July/August launch. The popularity of Super Mario Bros. 2 saw the magazine extend its coverage for one more world, while the cover story took Power Players deep into the heart (and rib, and eye . . .) of Transylvania. This feature led right into the monthly double-sided poster, with one side featuring a somewhat nonfunctional illustrated map of the Transylvanian countryside and the other highlighting one of the issue's other big new releases, Capcom's Bionic Commando. Perhaps the most interesting part of this guide is that it was illustrated with several quality animation-like scenes depicting Rad Spencer looking nothing like he did in the game (though exactly as he appeared on its box).

Other features included coverage of Konami's follow-up to Gradius, Life Force, as well as tips for getting through Taito's Renegade and Rare's R.C. Pro-Am Racing. Howard and Nester made their triumphant return, with the Nintendo Fun Club President pulling the rug out from under his young contemporary with a tip for Super Mario Bros. 2. Classified Information cracked the code of Kid Icarus's treasure rooms, while Counselor's Corner tackled such queries as "Where are the Warp Zones in Super Mario Bros.?" Now Playing tantalized readers with multi-page feature previews of Golgo 13 and Blaster Master, and Video Shorts gave a peek at numerous licensed and classic games coming to the Nintendo Entertainment System, from Superman and Indiana Jones to Pac-Man and Donkey Kong Classics, among many more.

Pak Watch revealed there were many more licensed games to come, including the first game outing of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Preceding it all was a special message from none other than Link, who told a sleeping Princess Zelda that due to the microchip shortage, Zelda II: The Adventure of Link would be available in limited quantities prior to the new year.

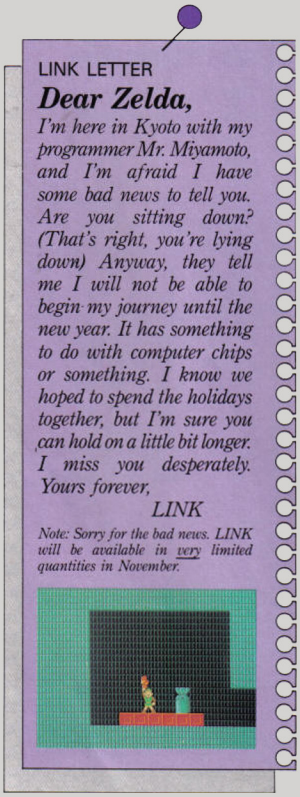
Finally, the issue's Fall Television Preview highlighted a show called TV 101, featuring a young Matt LeBlanc six years before he achieved superstardom in Friends. Nintendo knows! – **DAVID**

THE POWER SET

If you happened to be reading this issue in 1988 but still didn't own an NES, Nintendo had good news for you! The NES Journal revealed that they would be introducing a new bundle known as the "Power Set," which featured everything from the Action Set – system, Zapper, Super Mario Bros., Duck Hunt and two controllers (weren't those the days?) – plus the new Power Pad, a mat designed for real-life run-and-jump gameplay. World Class Track Meet, designed to use the Pad, joined Super Mario Bros. and Duck Hunt on the combo cartridge. (World Class Track Meet was actually a renaming of Stadium Events, a game that had failed to sell much as a standalone release. Today, copies of its original form are rare and worth thousands.)

RARE'S EARLY DAYS

Over a decade prior to being purchased by Microsoft, and still years before developing the likes of Donkey Kong Country, Banjo-Kazooie and GoldenEye, Nintendo had its eyes on Rare. A brief overview of the developer of Wizards & Warriors and this issue's R.C. Pro-Am Racing highlighted the two brothers who founded the company, Chris and Tim Stamper, and their rise from creating Jetpac on a home PC in 1983 to driving Lamborghinis, breeding Shire horses and flying aircraft in between developing new titles for the NES in 1988. Asked what was next for them, the duo teased that they were working on a "fantastic new board game concept," possibly alluding to what would eventually become known as Anticipation on the NES.



INTERVIEW

DATE OF BIRTH
June 8, 1965

BIRTHPLACE
Tokyo, Japan

POSITIONS
Founder, President and CEO of Genius Sonority, Inc.

BEST KNOWN FOR
Serving as the Director and Main Programmer for Dragon Quest III, IV, V, VI and VII

FAVORITE FOOD
Eggs

CURRENT PROJECTS
Can't answer. (It's a secret!)

MANABU YAMANA

The man who first helped Pokémon adventures come to consoles talks with us about what it's like to now be living beyond the waves.

INTERVIEW BY JONATHAN HOLMES

THE DENPA MEN

The Denpa Men series is one of Genius Sonority's first forays into non-Pokémon-related game development, though there is plenty of Poké-DNA to be found in these turn-based RPGs. Just like in Pokémon, there are plenty of cute little characters to catch, train and battle in Rock-Paper-Scissors-inspired elemental combat, though that's where most of the similarities end. Instead of capturing little monsters in the grass, you capture little baby-bodied men in unitards as they fly around on invisible radio waves.

Look around yourself using the 3DS's camera and you'll see tons of Denpa Men floating by. (The Denpa Men you might get to snag is determined by mysterious data collected by the wireless signal your 3DS picks up at the time of your search.) Heading out to different real-world locations will result in a different selection of Denpa Men to capture, encouraging you to explore the physical world – something few video games attempt to do.

A Denpa Man's elemental type is determined by the color of their unitard (Red = Fire, Green = Wind, etc). Some Denpa Men also have the ability to cast elemental magic, though the type of magic they possess may not not correlate with the color of their clothes. Mixing and matching the types of Denpa Men in your party (up to eight at at time) to make a combination best suited to tackle whatever challenge lies ahead feels similar to Pokémon, but at a faster pace and with a sillier style.

NF: First of all, when did you decide that you wanted to become a game developer?
MANABU YAMANA: When I was 12 years old.

How did you get your start in the industry?
I had a part-time job in a game development company when I was 17 years old.

What did you think about the Pokémon series being released on the GameCube?
I think that from the aspect of it as a Pokémon battle simulator, and through being able to show users another world, the number of ways that they could enjoy themselves grew.

If you could create a new home console Pokémon game without any restrictions, what kind of game would that be?
It would be nice if I could make a game where both children and adults could easily play and have a lot of fun together.

What lessons did you learn from your time with Dragon Quest and Pokémon and how have you applied them to The Denpa Men?
By producing well-known titles that are well loved by everyone, I have learned that we should first recognize expectations all players would naturally expect, and think along the lines of creating games that will meet those expectations and be interesting and fun in nature.

By making use of this knowledge, we have continued to use the standard RPG command-based battle system, as well as adjusting battle data.

The characters in The Denpa Men remind me a lot of the Katamari cousins, Tingle and Kobito Dukan, though they definitely have their own style. Did any of those serve as inspiration for the Denpa Men's designs?
Yes, I observed those characters and got my inspirations from them.

However, since I have changed the direction I'm heading with the Denpa Men series quite a bit, I feel what gives the characters their charm will vary.

You've just launched the third game in the Denpa Men series in Japan. Congratulations on your success! Why do you think the games have done so well?
Thank you. The third game in the series will have a plot based on the characters. Doesn't it give a new feel?

I think that the reason why the games have done so well is that though all releases have had their command-battle features refined, the plot has stayed the same, allowing players to easily enjoy themselves.

If someone weren't sure if they should purchase the Denpa Men because they've never played an RPG that doesn't have a lot of focus on story or cutscenes, what would you tell them?
I would tell them: This game lets you enjoy a good lengthy gameplay, is made up of profound concepts but allows you to play with ease. That is why you should try it!

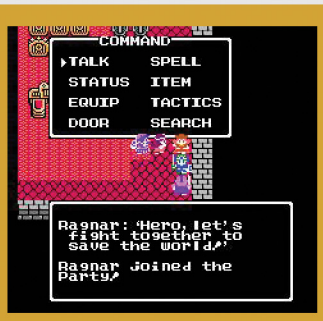
What do you think of independent game publishing and development scene in Japan right now?
There are a few games with hit designs and perfect gameplay out there in the indie scene. That is why I think that the independent game publishing and development scene in Japan is something to look forward to!

How has it been to work with Nintendo over the years?
Although I am not an employee at Nintendo, I have had a long relation to Nintendo's platforms. I think I can only say that I am honored to work with Nintendo.

As Genius Sonority continues to grow, what type of new games and genres would you like to take on?
Designing games is on an occasion-by-occasion basis, so I can only imagine two immediate future works. So right now it is hard for me to say what the future will bring.

Finally, if you could have one super power, what would it be?
I don't know if my answer fits the question or not, but my super power would be being able to forget feelings. No matter how many times I would play a game, it would always feel like I was playing that game for the first time.

DRAGON WARRIOR III
NES, 1991



DRAGON WARRIOR IV
NES, 1992

DRAGON WARRIOR VII
PLAYSTATION, 2001

DRAGON QUEST SWORDS
Wii, 2008

BEFORE THE DENPA MEN

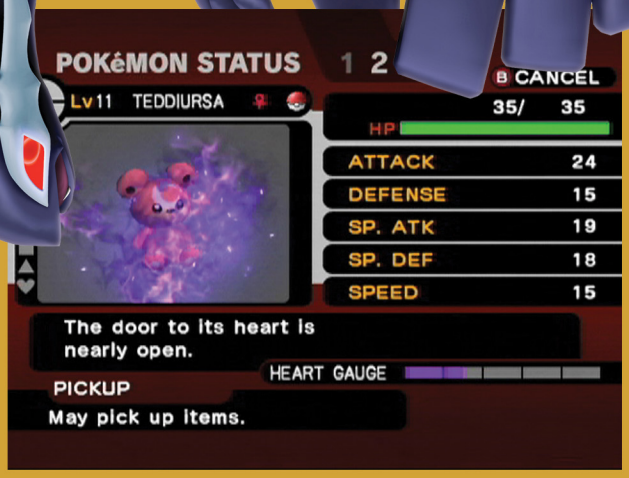
POKÉMON XD: GALE OF DARKNESS

GameCube, 2005

The direct sequel to Colosseum (see below), Pokémon XD: Gale of Darkness expanded upon the original in nearly every way. Taking place five years after Wes' adventure, XD placed you in the role of Michael, a bright young Pokémon trainer out to make the world a better place. Gale of Darkness has you returning to some of the same locations in Orre as in Colosseum, though there is a lot more to do this time around.

The story centers around stopping the evil Cipher organization from abusing Pokémon in their pursuit of world domination. This time around you're able to catch wild Pokémon, and snag legendaries like Lugia, Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres. Gale of Darkness also marked the first appearance of Gen IV Pokémon Munchlax and Bonsly. They weren't obtainable, but that didn't matter to a lot of Pokémon fans who were just excited to get glimpse of what the next generation of Pocket Monsters had to offer.

It's now been eight years since XD came to the GameCube, but no other 3D Pokémon adventure game has been made for a console system since. Nintendo and Game Freak seem happy to keep the core series on portables, and they're going 3D now too with X and Y – so it may be XD will be the last of its kind.



POKÉMON TROZEI
DS, 2006

POKÉMON BATTLE REVOLUTION
Wii, 2007

LEARN WITH POKÉMON: TYPING ADVENTURE
DS, 2011 (JAPAN & EUROPE ONLY)

POKÉMON COLOSSEUM

GameCube, 2004

For years, fans asked for a traditional Pokémon adventure on home consoles, and Pokémon Colosseum and its sequel are still as close as we've gotten. Colosseum put players in the Orre region, playing the role of Wes, a mysterious member of the villainous Team Snagem. Unlike in the heroes of other Pokémon titles, Wes is able to steal other trainers' Pokémon, though they must be purified before they can be traded to the GBA titles. (Obtaining all the Pokémon in Fire Red/Leaf Green, Ruby/Sapphire/Emerald and Colosseum was the only way to "catch 'em all" in the GBA era.) Colosseum also came with a special disc that allowed you to unlock Jirachi on your GBA game, and it had a Pokémon Stadium-style Vs. mode, making it one of the most complete home console Pokémon titles to date.

REVIEWS

So, just how good is The Wonderful 101? Well, in a word, wonderful! (You probably saw that one coming, didn't you?) Flip the page for our full review!

Freedom of Assembly

THE WONDERFUL 101

PLATINUMGAMES' ACTION-PACKED superhero title The Wonderful 101 stands as a bold testament to Nintendo's commitment to providing games for the more "hardcore" gamer on the Wii U – both in concept and in execution. It's a unique, engaging experience that serves as a fantastic addition to Platinum's already impressive resume, but in return for its satisfying combat and hilariously over-the-top setpieces, it demands lightning-fast reflexes, true effort and unwavering patience.

The Wonderful 101 maintains an unrelenting pace from the start, when players are immediately thrown head-first into the action as mild-mannered school teacher Will Wedgewood's class field trip is unceremoniously interrupted by marauding GEATHJERK invaders. Will (secretly a superhero) is forced to engage his CENTINEL suit and transform into Wonder Red, utilizing his unique "Unite Hand" power to combat the alien foes. It's with no sense of apology that this opening sequence reads like a plot ripped straight from a Saturday morning cartoon – the entire tone of the game embraces the cheesy, adrenaline-pumped tropes of superhero fiction with a knowing wink, from Wonder Red's multi-national "Captain Planet"-esque main crew to the scenery-chewing delivery of enemy monologues.

The Wonderful 101 resists typical genre classification as a sophisticated brawler married with group management elements and light platforming. It seems, in a way, like the lovechild of director Hideki Kamiya's previous work on Capcom's Viewtiful Joe and Nintendo's much-lauded Pikmin series, with boss battles rivaling the scale of both.

Each of the seven "main" members of the Wonderful 100 (the extra "1" is *you*, the opening narration gleefully points out) provides their own "Unite Morph," an ability to form their teammates into the shape of weapons to both attack opponents and solve puzzles in each stage. Activating the Morphs requires drawing each one's corresponding shape on the GamePad touch screen, which proves surprisingly responsive but nonetheless difficult during heated battles due to the requirement of moving one hand away from the face buttons. Switching shapes can also be done by making the motion with the right analog stick – and that quickly became my preferred method, due to how much faster it is. (Though, barring some rare recognition issues between certain shapes, forming the desired configuration is quick and satisfying regardless of the method used.) Up to five Unite Morphs can be used at any one time, encouraging the player to explore the myriad combo opportunities available.

The game's campaign is split into missions, which are further divided into four parts. These missions normally include three stages of battling through waves of enemies and rescuing civilians while traversing the environment, while the fourth stage serves as a boss battle. Performance in each encounter or puzzle is graded based upon speed of completion, complexity of combos used and damage taken, encouraging

Wii U PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: PLATINUMGAMES

replay of the same sections to improve scores. And further incentivizing the stage revisitation is the shop system – new moves and upgrades are purchased using "O-Parts" obtained from defeating enemies and rewarded as prizes for high scores, so returning to stages already completed makes the game easier in the long run.

It's about halfway into the game that it becomes apparent how useful this aspect is – The Wonderful 101 is not by any stretch of the imagination an easy game, nor at times does it seem particularly fair. The camera sits claustrophobically close to the action, an issue somewhat alleviated with a quick tap of the L Button to zoom out, but compounded by the sheer number of characters on-screen. This allows enemies to attack from beyond the boundaries of the visible action before the player is ever given a chance to react – as suffering a blow from an enemy scatters your squad, the heroes can no longer form Unite Morphs until they regroup (meaning even defensive forms are off-limits). This leaves the player in a frustrating cycle of constantly being hit before being able to coalesce. There are moments such as these during The Wonderful 101 that, despite its relentless charm and fantastic premise, will discourage many players from continuing with the experience – and that's an absolute shame, considering the game's best moments are during its final hours.

The ability to alter the difficulty level after every stage is a welcome feature here – knocking the game down to "Easy" to continue upgrading your squad is a good tactic to alleviate frustration. However, further into the game the realization dawns – if being attacked from off-screen is making the game grueling, how can I prevent enemies from separating? How can I manage my team to effectively counter several threats at once? Once the player begins effectively utilizing all their abilities to answer these questions, it becomes clear that The Wonderful 101 is not being unfair, but is adequately preparing the player for later challenges.

9.0

The game's refusal to make concessions in its level of challenge ultimately serves to illustrate how tight the design is; each attack and ability has its pros and cons, and being unable to effectively juggle these in combat will halt progression until the player is willing to amend how they play. It's a heavy-handed manner for the game to enforce its expected play style, but an effective method to ensure the player fully understands its mechanics.

Once the player acquiesces to the game's demands, however, The Wonderful 101 is a joy to play – a fantastic experience that earns its place among the other classics of its illustrious PlatinumGames pedigree. Delivering devastating combos with a giant whip before forming a gargantuan sword to reflect oncoming lasers becomes effortless, as does chaining together multiple Unite Forms simultaneously to make quick work of foes that once seemed so imposing. The game even manages to make the oft-criticized Quick-Time Events enjoyable, calling on the player to switch forms in the middle of cutscenes in a manner that is exhilarating and natural. Said cinematics are a joy to behold, due in no small part to the hilarious cast of characters – each member of the main crew has a distinct personality, their banter delivered perfectly by an energetic and talented voice-over cast.

Ultimately, it may seem contradictory that a game that can conceivably reduce a player to throwing their controller in frustration could arguably be one of the best games on Wii U, but the fact stands regardless. The Wonderful 101 is a frenetic, hilarious brawler that synthesises cheesy superhero cliches with a surprising level of sincerity and heart. It's a unique game, its charming presentation contrasting its stubborn execution, demanding the player meets it on its own terms. Those willing to take the challenge head-on will be rewarded with what will surely become a cult classic in the coming years, and as such, The Wonderful 101 comes with a hearty recommendation. (Just don't expect to reach those ending credits without clearing some hurdles along the way.) – **ROBERT**

UNITE FIST

Wonder Red's signature attack is forming his companions into a colossal hand and slugging any enemy foolish enough to draw near. The Unite Fist can be used for uppercuts, launching foes into the air for a follow-up combo, as well as a running punch that can knock enemies for a loop. What it lacks in range or finesse, it makes up for in brute strength. As an exploratory tool, the giant hand can be used to collect objects or turn dials – I'm sure that there are no jars on Earth that Wonder Red can't open.

UNITE WHIP

Matching the personality of its hot-headed Transylvanian owner Wonder Pink, the Unite Whip cuts directly through the defenses of its victims, delivering a barbed attack that rips the armor from enemy mechanisms. The Unite Whip is indispensable for dispatching robots and tanks, tearing asunder their protective shells to allow other Unite Forms to inflict increased damage. A fantastic mid-range companion to the Unite Sword, the Unite Whip is a great choice for the hero who wants to inflict moderate damage while keeping a safe distance. It can also be used as a grappling hook to traverse gaping chasms, or to pull large levers to unlock doors. Some of the supporting characters seem to imply being whipped by Wonder Pink wouldn't be all that bad, but the Wonderful 100's enemies would be inclined to disagree.

UNITE GUN

Jolly gourmand Wonder Green possesses the ability to arrange his colleagues into the form of a large firearm, firing teammates into distant enemies. The number of people used in this configuration determines how large the gun is, ranging from a lowly pistol to an imposing Super Scope-esque rifle. (And these are only a few of the Unite forms!)

Worth the Wait?

RAYMAN LEGENDS

WE'VE WAITED A long time for Rayman Legends to hit Wii U, but was the wait worth it? For the most part, yes, but even still, Rayman's latest escapade isn't without its blemishes.

A TRAGICALLY LEGENDARY HISTORY

Rayman's Wii U debut has had a bit of a checkered history for Nintendo fans. Rayman Legends was one of the first games we learned about for Wii U, with a leaked trailer in April 2012 that showcased some crazy uses of the Wii U GamePad. It was then one of the first Wii U games ever demoed at Ubisoft's E3 2012 press conference and proceeded to steal the show as one of the brightest and most exciting experiences on display for the forthcoming system. The excitement was so palatable that in-store Wii U kiosks even featured a demo of it leading up to last year's system launch.

Then, tragedy struck – slowly. Initially, Rayman Legends was a launch title. Then it was slated for a December 2012 release. Then it slipped past New Year's and the concrete date that was soon circled on everyone's calendars was February 26.

Wii U owners would finally have something new to play! Rayman Legends was positioned to be one of the marquee Wii U releases of early 2013.

Roughly three weeks before release, though, the ultimate delay happened. The game got pushed back to September, and, even worse, it would no longer be a Wii U exclusive. Nintendo fans raged, and some even picketed outside of developer Ubisoft Montpellier's office. Ubisoft's decision might have been financially wise, as systems weren't exactly flying off the shelf in February (nor are they now, sadly), but it still burned.

Now, finally, Legends is here. And after that six-month delay, it (almost) sticks its long-awaited landing.

ALMOST A LIMBLESS DELIGHT

Throughout the game's five worlds and ample amount of unlockables, the experience is always beautiful and mostly fun. The team at Ubisoft Montpellier took a solid (albeit overrated in my opinion) foundation in Rayman Origins and improved upon it in every way. Legends' levels are better designed. The worlds are more fully realized. The experience is just way more cohesive.

The platforming is refined from Origins, with the jumping feeling a little less floaty. In general, it feels like you have more control over your character, something that I found lacking in Rayman's last adventure. It's still not as tight as I'd like, but for the most part, if you mess up, you know it's your own fault.

The level design is also vastly improved, though nearly every level seems to be just a little too long.

And Legends features a whole slew of in-level collectibles that can be found by exploring every nook and cranny. Most of them are in plain sight, and the ones that are tucked away somewhere – requiring any prodding or precision platforming – are few and far between.

Each world has its own theme in both play style and aesthetics. One world is stealth-oriented in a deep sea setting, but outside of some amusing laser-focused moments, it's one of the weaker segments. However, one thing Ubisoft nailed is the swimming; the swimming in Legends is some of the best ever in a 2D platformer.

Another world has a mariachi theme with an odd focus on food. That particular world is a particular highlight of the game's creativity, and the

Wii U PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPER: UBISOFT MONTPELLIER

most fun I had throughout the six-hour story mode.

Each world has an end boss that is usually a mixture of pattern recognition and spectacle. Some bosses are more memorable than others, and unfortunately, the final boss is the weakest of the bunch. Still, when you're fighting a luchador or a weird mechanical worm thing in the other worlds, it's always a wondrous setpiece showdown.

MUSICALLY DELICIOUS

Each world is also capped off by a musical level, which play in a style similar to the Bit.Trip Runner games. The songs are usually familiar, such as Black Betty, and they play along with your jumps, hits and movement. Even better, each song is done in the style of the game world it appears in (so Eye of the Tiger is sort-of Spanish-themed, as it's placed in the Fiesta de los Muertos world). These levels are the best part about the entire experience, though there aren't many of them in total. A few remixes are hidden in the unlockables, but still, the music levels are woefully underused.

Even outside of the music levels, the sound design is spectacular. Each world's theme gives its score a slightly different style, and it even shifts dynamically. Some of the incidental sounds are annoying – especially the meows and cries for help that come out of the hidden Teensies' mouths. But aside from that, Legends boasts a delightful audio presentation from start to finish, with a sweet soundtrack that spans many genres.

MURFY'S FOLLY

Unlike the sound design, the GamePad usage in gameplay isn't as delightful. Once every three levels, the embodiment of the GamePad, a doofy character named Murfy, shows his ugly mug on a level painting. That means, if you're playing single-player, you have to relinquish control of your jumping dynamo to the computer so you can finger-swipe at ropes and hold down virtual buttons. Essentially, you're playing a simple touch screen-based game every other level or so. And while Legends boasts five-player support (using a variety of control schemes), not every level makes use of the GamePad, so some levels are basically four-player affairs – and the levels that aren't Murfy-heavy are astoundingly boring for the GamePad user.

In some sections, like the rare musical level, the touch screen usage and platforming fuse together with wonderful symmetry, with one relying on the other without any shouts of "Hey dude, clear out that marshmallow gunk so we can get the other Teensy!" In general, the single-player experience features way too much mandatory Murfy usage. As a change of pace, it isn't bad. It just happens too often.

A WHOLE GLOBOX FULL OF SECRETS

If you can get past some of Legends' shortcomings, then you could play the game for a long time. Among the unlockables are a whole mess of extra levels, ranging from a bonus musical world to a fair number of ported-over Rayman Origins levels. In such close proximity to Legends' superior stages, though, the weaknesses of Origins' offerings shine through even brighter than before.

Also unlockable are a wide variety of costume skins for Rayman, Globox, the Teensies and newcomer Barbara, as well as a robust creature compendium.

Finally, returning from the Wii U-exclusive Rayman Legends Challenge App are daily and weekly challenges. Those are still a whole lot of fun, and if you have a bunch of friends checking in every day, it can be an absolute blast. You even get a bonus in Legends if you played the App. (Though, sadly, the App is now no longer available since the full game has gone on sale.)

IN CONCLUSION

So, was Rayman Legends worth the wait? Yes and no. It's undoubtedly a fun romp, but it doesn't stack up well against the very best platformers already out there – annoyances like the overbearing touch screen emphasis drag it down. But it's still definitely worth playing. As a single-player game, yes, but rocking it with some friends will give you maximum enjoyment – and the kind of fun you've been waiting six months for.

– NEAL

THE Wii U DIFFERENCE

On the Wii U, Rayman Legends has a few unique features. The main one is its GamePad usage, which all starts with its menu system. The GamePad displays all sorts of helpful information that is relegated to the pause menu if you use any other control scheme. You can jump to different screens with the touch of a button, check in on your friends' progress, and see what new unlockables you have to check out. You can also post to Miiverse easily using the GamePad. It's a smart way of using the GamePad in a beneficial but still peripheral manner.

The GamePad is also used to control Murfy. In other versions, you just use Murfy by pressing a button – but on the Wii U, you often switch to just controlling the experience on the touch screen, playing as Murfy directly. Also, since Murfy is playable, you can play with five players at once. Even in levels when Murfy isn't used, bubbles appear on the GamePad screen that can be popped. Most of the time, you just get the nice feedback of the sound of a popped bubble. Sometimes, hearts appear in the bubbles and popping them can benefit your on-screen character.

The Wii U version is also reportedly and technically the best-looking version to boot, likely stemming from the fact Legends was originally a Wii U exclusive. While we're a Nintendo-focused magazine and would likely recommend the Nintendo system version over other ones on principle, this is one case where the recommendation isn't just a personal preference. The Wii U version is the best version of Rayman Legends, touch screen focus and all.

7.5

ASK THE FORCE

WHAT GAME FROM YOUR CHILDHOOD GAVE YOU YOUR BEST SUMMER EVER?

EMILY ROGERS

Summer '98 gave me some of my favorite memories thanks to the late June release of Banjo-Kazooie. I realized this game would be a classic after collecting my first jigsaw piece!

MATTHEW TARANTO

I'll never forget renting a Super Nintendo from the local game store for a week, and diving right into my all-time favorite game – Super Metroid – for the first time!

BRETT MARTIN

Nintendo's '90 and '94 PowerFests happened in the summer, and I remember being able to play games before release, like Mega Man 3 and ClayFighter 2 respectively. Grabbing exclusive swag didn't hurt either! Heh.

EVAN CAMPBELL

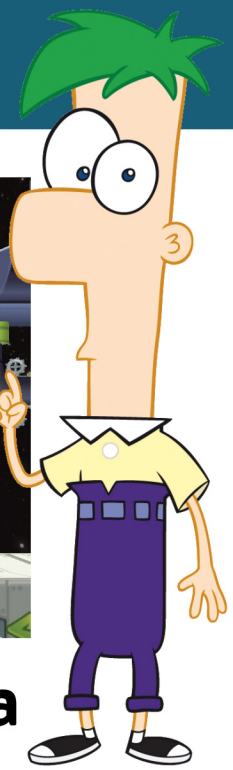
I played baseball every summer growing up, and Super Baseball Simulator 1.000 was a fantastic virtual fix of the sport with zany special abilities.

KEVIN CASSIDY

One summer, I crowded around a TV with my friends and played Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers from start to finish. We were dazzled by the graphics, sang along with the theme song and erupted with cheers when we beat the game!

LINDSEY LAYNE KING

My dad knew I loved art and Mario games, so one day he surprised me with my own copy of Mario Paint. I spent hours making pictures, composing music and swatting robo-gnats. It was also the first time I ever tried my hand at animation!



I Know What We're Gonna Do Today!

PHINEAS AND FERB: QUEST FOR COOL STUFF

ONE OF THE best things about the Phineas and Ferb cartoon is how it's able to appeal to a broad range of audiences, from children to adults. Unfortunately, older fans of the step-brother duo and their pet platypus may have a more difficult time finding the game as engaging.

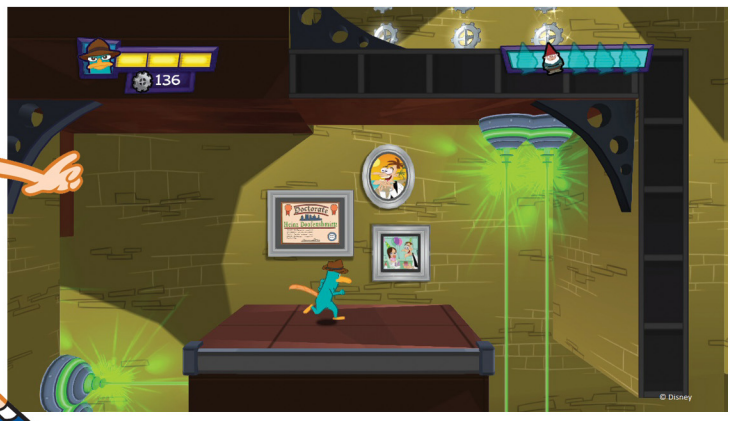
Make no mistake: With only one difficulty level, generous respawn points, no bosses and an unlimited supply of lives, Phineas and Ferb: Quest for Cool Stuff is definitely aimed at a younger audience. It weighs in pretty lightly overall, with 13 stages featuring Phineas and Ferb in their transforming A.T.T. robot, and five more starring Agent P interspersed throughout. It only took around three hours for me to reach approximately 90% completion, and the rest probably won't take long.

Both Agent P and the A.T.T. control largely the same, with a few slight differences. In the case of the brothers, there's a slight hint of Metroid-like exploration involved, as certain areas of earlier stages can only be visited after acquiring specific items later on. In addition to sidequests, collecting all the treasures, lawn gnomes and Ducky Momos gives a good reason to revisit stages, but none of it is too difficult. It would have been nice, though, if instead of digging up numerous gold nuggets or dinosaur bones, the treasures were more individualized, such as in some Wario Land or Castlevania titles.

Fans of the show will enjoy the dialogue of the characters – Dr. Doofenshmirtz and his Norm Patrollers especially – as they use the same voices as the animated series and their lines are delivered perfectly. There are also a number of tunes from the show, including a full version of the theme song on the title screen (no animated intro, though). There's nothing quite like going towards your final showdown with Dr. Doof as the Agent P theme pumps you up. Graphically, it looks like the show, but in 3D; this can be a strength and a weakness at any given moment, as the characters were clearly not designed with 3D in mind.

We're giving this a 7.5, but you might want to add or subtract from that score depending on how big a fan you are of the show and how experienced you are with platformers, or gaming in general. – **DAVID**

Wii U PUBLISHER: MAJESCO DEVELOPER: BEHAVIOUR INTERACTIVE



7.5

6.5

Flawed Fischer

SPLINTER CELL: BLACKLIST

"FINISH THE JOB . . . nothing comes before that," Sam Fisher shouts during Splinter Cell: Blacklist. I wish Ubisoft had followed his advice, because this stealth game feels like a rush job on Wii U. And that's unfortunate, since there's some great content here.

Fisher's newest exploits revolve around a terrorist cell known as The Engineers, who announce a deadly set of attacks called the Blacklist after blowing up an Air Force base in Guam (this also is how the game kicks off). From here, Fisher heads up a counter-terrorism unit – Fourth Echelon – that makes dismantling The Engineers its top priority.

The storyline aims for the summer blockbuster crowd, with enough explosions and gadgets and weaponry to make even director Michael Bay blush. And then there's Fisher as the star of the show. He's tough and rugged on the outside but loves his team (and his daughter) on the inside. Yes, it's cliché. And yes, the plot fits into the mold of similar action and first-person shooter games; it's nothing new.

But Splinter Cell: Blacklist gets exciting once on a mission. Ubisoft Toronto (with Ubisoft Shanghai handling porting duties for Wii U) presents somewhat of an open structure to each level, letting players decide whether to tackle a stage stealthily or with guns blazing. And it works well. For a Ghost tactic, Fisher can utilize sleeping gas, proximity shock mines and a tri-rotor drone to silently avoid and/or neutralize enemies. Or, on the other hand, Fisher can engage enemies head-on with an assault rifle and frag grenades, blasting his way through each checkpoint.

Each play style has upsides, and most players will dabble in both without even thinking twice (along with a middle-of-the-road option that the developers coined as Panther). This versatility adds more layers to the series' traditional stealth mechanics, and each method handles well. Even running and gunning feels just as good as most action-focused titles, with responsive over-the-shoulder shooting and maneuvering. I ventured down the Ghost path more often than not, wielding a stun gun and tossing sleeping-gas grenades here and there. The shadows were my allies, and Fisher's suit lights light up elegantly when his body is hidden.

There are a few frustrations, though, when disposing of enemies. Sometimes the game wouldn't recognize my button inputs when trying to silently take out an adversary while behind cover. As such, foes alerted reinforcements and the Ghost path came crumbling down, much to my annoyance. These control hiccups are the exception, not the norm, but still highlight the flaws of the title as Fisher goes down quickly and the checkpoint reloads.

On Wii U, the GamePad serves as as the OPSAT for Fisher, displaying all of his armaments and gadgets as hot-key touch buttons. This functionality is nice, and I found simply tapping the icon quicker than bringing up the on-screen radial menu. The Pad also showcases the action when operating the tri-rotor, which is OK (though turning off motion-based controls for sticks is recommendable), but the TV screen displays a boring static image instead of still showing Fisher's position. That's a missed opportunity. Off-TV Play is alive and well too, and all in all, Splinter Cell: Blacklist feels right at home control-wise on Nintendo's home console.

But in almost every other way, the Wii U port seems inferior to other versions. Loading is painstakingly slow when starting new missions. This issue also pervades the menu system when upgrading Fisher's arsenal and suit or customizing your Spies vs. Mercs characters. The long pauses didn't aggravate me much during the early hours, but became intolerable later on. The title throws a plethora of challenges at players throughout the experience, egging you on to repeat stages or tackle levels in new ways – but that's not going to happen without quicker loading times and snappier customization options.

What's worse are the problems regarding online play, specifically in Spies vs. Mercs, which is otherwise a cool and strategic multiplayer mode. Finding matches is a chore and impossible at times, thanks to connection issues (and probably a small install base too). Once in a matchup, it's almost like playing roulette, as sometimes the battles go swimmingly and other times it's chaos. For instance, one game threw me into the Mercs role initially, with a goal of stopping Spies from hacking three different computers on the map. The lobby was full before entering the arena, but no enemies appeared – in-game or on the scoreboard. Yet, they magically infected the three systems. After halftime, as a Spy, I easily reached all three hotspots without any interference (still no one was showing up), which led to a tie. I still don't understand what happened.

Complaints of similar issues litter the Miiverse community, and although Ubisoft talks about possible patches, the fact of the matter is the damage is done. Why come back to a broken system day after day when there are better online games available on Wii U, like Black Ops II?

From a presentation standpoint, Blacklist makes nice use of lighting and voice acting, though the character models range from realistic to awkward, with weird eyes and plastic faces. Really, everything visually comes across as serviceable and workmanlike, fitting for the mood and game but nothing not seen before.

Splinter Cell: Blacklist provides thrilling missions that offer player choice and variety, which is awesome. The minute-to-minute experience inside operations is the high point, while the story and presentation merely serve as an average wrapper for the package. The main problems persist solely on Wii U, though, which is a shame. Spies vs. Mercs is fun, unique and tactical but doesn't work reliably. Add in loading issues, and technical difficulties severely hold this version back.

It's just unfortunate – I wish Ubisoft had finished this job. – **EVAN**

Wii U PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
DEVELOPERS: UBISOFT TORONTO / UBISOFT SHANGHAI

To Infinity (and Beyond?)

DISNEY INFINITY

8.0

DISNEY IS A company with decades of pop culture history behind it, so the prospect of them working on a figurine-based game that crosses over all of those years' worth of properties is an enticing one. Disney Infinity, at first glance, tries to compete directly with Activision's Skylanders craze – and there could be some really easy snap judgments to be made through that comparison. When you start picking the games apart, though, you'll see that both of them approach the "toys come to life" idea in completely different manners. Disney Infinity is a more playful take on this new genre, and it does some neat things to make it feel wholly original.

The game opens with introductions to the game's initial mechanics, as you try to understand what Disney Infinity is all about. You'll quickly realize that there are two components to the package.

First, there are the Play Sets. These all offer different experiences in worlds themed after various Disney cartoons or films. The initial starter pack comes with three of them, and each one has its own special elements.

The Monsters University set is focused on the fraternity wars between collegiate creatures, tying in to Pixar's latest film that just debuted in theaters earlier this summer.

Going back a few years further, there's the Pirates of the Caribbean set – it's more action- and adventure-focused as you solve puzzles and explore the sea with Captain Jack Sparrow.

And then there's The Incredibles. In its set, you explore an open-world cityscape and use your superpowers to keep the citizens safe and sound.

Each set is certainly a lot of fun to romp through, but they're all a bit on the easier side of gaming. This makes Infinity enjoyable to play with younger family members, but, at the same time, that's also where one of the title's major problems pops up. To play multiplayer in any of the Play Sets, you need to own a second character from the same universe – and those are only available by a separate purchase. It stinks to have to pay extra to play multiplayer, especially when the core game's Starter Pack is already a lofty $74.99 on its own.

Luckily, the Play Sets' strict rules don't apply to Toy Box mode. There, you can do whatever you want. You can have any combination of characters interact with each other. You can build your own levels. You can just throw random toys around everywhere and play with no particular goal in mind.

It's also possible to explore Toy Boxes others have created, though you'll have to download each one. Disney seems to update its list of featured user-made Boxes with five new entries each week, so you won't be left wanting for variety.

Once you're online, you can additionally link yourself with up to three other players and take on challenges within these landscapes together. You can set up races, goof around and just generally "play." It's a lot of fun – though only at its best with people who like Disney just as much as you.

Despite all the good that the game offers, there are also some aspects to simply dislike. Learning to control the Toy Box takes a little while and the whole system seems confusing on your first attempt. There are sloppy animations that bring down the visual presentation, and the load times are, quite frankly, a big gigantic hassle to get through. The camera is a chore to deal with sometimes, too. All things to keep in mind when you're weighing out a nearly $80 purchase.

Disney Infinity delivers on its promise to bring many of the company's pop culture properties together in lovely looking open worlds, each with their own charm and concepts. The gameplay is a bit on the easy side, and the Toy Box takes some adjustment, but once you've mastered the control, the overall Infinity experience is engaging.

We'll keep an eye on this one as new Play Sets are added over time, as the Starter Pack is just the beginning for this new endeavor. But even with just what's available now, Disney Infinity has already made a lasting impression on me. – **DAAN**

Wii U PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: AVALANCHE SOFTWARE

Painful When Portable

DISNEY INFINITY: TOY BOX CHALLENGE

THE 3DS VERSION of Disney Infinity was doomed from the start. It was never going to come close to offering players even a fraction of the freedom and creativity of the console editions, and, what's worse, it got started in development too late to have enough time to adapt the other versions' missions. So when it was first announced that the handheld Infinity would be its own, self-contained thing, I cheered – for a very brief moment. After that, I realized who has behind the title and screamed in utter fear.

Disney Infinity: Toy Box Challenge (note the subtitle) can be summed up as a Mario Party game that's been stripped away of anything enjoyable. You move across game boards, try to clear objectives and collect a bunch of little Infinity signs to improve your chances of victory. The developers must have been obsessed with stars, too, as they toss them at you over and over again, for any occasion imaginable. That blurs the line between winning and losing and makes every outcome incredibly unpredictable – which, admittedly, is where fun almost has a chance to happen.

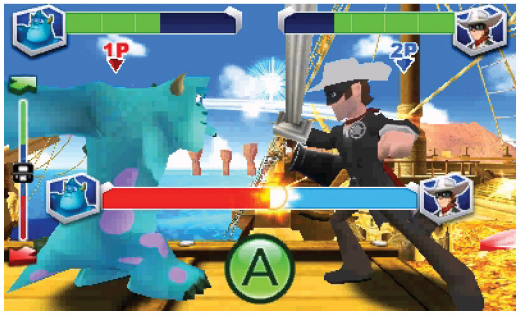
When a character triggers an event or lands on a mini-game space, you're thrown into one of 50 extremely boring mini-games. Even though the goals in these are always totally different, your character moves through each with the same slow, painful and tiresome pace, making each of the 50 a chore to play. Sometimes you'll catch a glimmer of hope – some piece of something clever or interesting – but those moments quickly disappear.

The developers also didn't shy away from simply copying popular gaming tropes, either – even iOS franchises like Doodle Jump get knocked off in this Toy Box.

But the worst thing of all is that these mini-game sequences are flawed on a technical level, as the game seems to really chug along, dropping frames and bringing the experience down even more. Add to this the fact that the scanner and figurines barely get used after the initial set-up ($74.99 to get this, remember), and you have a game that seriously isn't worth its asking price. – **DAAN**

3.0

3DS PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: ALTRON CORP.



Not Quite a Nosedive

DISNEY PLANES

THOUGH THEY'RE FREQUENTLY not worth my while, I still like to check in on movie-licensed games every now and then to see if I might just stumble across a hidden gem. My instincts failed me the last time I took a look at this category – you can go back to our debut issue to read my review of the abysmal mess that was branded as Wreck-It Ralph on Wii – but even with that disappointment not yet faded from my memory, I still felt compelled to give Disney Planes a try.

Thankfully, this one isn't nearly as bad.

That doesn't mean it's all that good, either, but at least this adaptation of the recent film that takes place "above the world of Cars" is playable, and even fairly fun – just unsurprising and unexciting.

You take command of the movie's stars – Dusty, Skipper, Ishani or one of several others – and take to the sky to complete a variety of flying missions. There's a thin story, but it basically amounts to "here's what the characters were up to after the film ended."

Control is great, and makes me long for a Star Fox revival – Fox McCloud would soar in HD. The visuals here are solid, though nothing mind-blowing.

And that's where the entire rest of the game lands, too – whether racing through circular, hovering checkpoints or dusting the crops of Propwash Junction, there's never any "wow" moment to be found in Planes for Wii U. The most fun thing here is just taking a spin around in Free Flight mode, exploring at your leisure.

So Planes doesn't hit any big heights, but doesn't crash and burn either. Consider it for a weekend rental. – **LUCAS**

Wii U PUBLISHER: DISNEY INTERACTIVE
DEVELOPER: BEHAVIOUR INTERACTIVE

6.0

My Multitasking Mind

PIKMIN 3

9.5

OK, LET'S SEE. I'm going to need a squad of Blues to go get that orange that's underwater over there – 10 should be more than enough, since Brittany's team cleared out all the enemies along the way yesterday. Then there's that cave I haven't finished exploring yet – I'll send 20 Yellows and 20 Pinks with Alph over there and have them wait at the entrance until I can get back to them. That leaves 50 for Charlie's fighting force. Half Reds, half Rocks, ready to finally take down that huge beastie that crushed so many of our guys last night.

Alright, it's a plan. Let's go!

Pikmin 3 has brought out the multitasker in me. I'm normally the kind of guy who likes to fixate on a single goal, devoting all my attention and energy to just the one thing until it's accomplished, then moving to the next job on my list. But in Pikmin 3, I think my natural approach to tackling tasks has shifted – here, I'm constantly splitting my mind in three directions at once.

You'd think I'd be opposed to the change, but I found myself having a blast in stepping outside my normal comfort zone of one-thing-at-a-time – and I never felt too overwhelmed by it, either. I think it's helped that I've played the Pikmin games since the beginning, too, and the series has slowly become more complex over time, allowing my brain to gradually grow, step by step.

In 2001's original Pikmin for the GameCube, I was introduced to Captain Olimar. He crash-landed on an alien planet, met the helpful ant-like plant soldiers called Pikmin and recruited them to help him gather up the scattered pieces of his shattered spaceship. Though up to 100 Pikmin could be active at any one time and I could set them to work on different tasks in different areas simultaneously, there was still just the one captain front-and-center on my TV at all times. A one-to-one connection between me and my in-game avatar.

Then, in 2004, Pikmin 2 doubled my mental workload. Olimar's partner Louie was introduced, and the game had me bouncing back and forth between the two, managing two separate squads of Pikmin at once. It wasn't much of a synaptic strain, and was really just more of a convenience than anything else – while I charged into battle with one hero, I could rest assured that my second explorer was hovering back and keeping watch over my weaker soldiers, always just one quick button-press away.

Going from two to three, though, has changed this series' dynamic considerably. Pikmin 3 replaces Olimar and Louie in the playable roles with a trio of hungry heroes from the famished world of Koppai. Alph, Brittany and Charlie – yep, A, B and C – are on a mission to find and gather as much edible matter as possible from this same alien world, so that they might return to their home planet and save its population from starvation.

Something goes wrong as they enter what they call Planet PNF-404's atmosphere, though – some mysterious force causes their ship to crash, ejecting and separating Alph, Brittany and Charlie from one another. The game makes use of this plot device to tutorialize you through the early hours of this new adventure, of course – it lets you begin with just one hero and find and rescue the other two, slowly introducing mechanics and controls along the way, rather than flinging you head-first into full-on multitasking mode. But once you've re-assembled the entire trio, that's when things shift into high gear.

I'd begin each new day with an immediate pause of the action (so that no daylight would be lost while I planned my strategy). I'd identify three different goals to achieve. Then I'd determine how many and what types of Pikmin were needed, assemble those squads, assign them to one of the three heroes and send them auto-walking to their objective. Once one group was headed in the right direction, then, it was time to immediately pause the action once again and shift attention to the second group. Then the third.

Oh, what's that? Group 1 has reached the point I told them to walk to? Great – shift to them with a quick button-tap. Take direct control to have those Pikmin grab the nearest fruit or fight the nearest enemy. Goal achieved? Pause. Issue new auto-walk command to send them to the next objective. Unpause. Shift to Group 2, to check in on them. They're doing fine? OK. Shift again, to Group 3. Take direct control there for a while. What? Group 1's under attack somewhere? Pause . . .

. . . and so on. Seriously, the mental gymnastics and manual dexterity to bounce back and forth between controllers created a gameplay dynamic here that I've never experienced before, and it was a blast. Pikmin 3 brought out the multitasker in me, a confirmed one-thing-at-a-time personality, and I loved every minute of it.

The dynamic of separately and simultaneously directing the actions of Alph, Brittany and Charlie is the foundation of the Pikmin 3 experience, but there's plenty more to talk about with this long-awaited sequel.

Visually, it's a delight – Nintendo's first, true chance to showcase what they're capable of with an HD canvas to paint on. The detail of PNF-404 shines through in every scene, and the level design even pulls back and repositions the camera to show off the most striking setpieces in low-key moments.

The gameplay balance is superb, as each of the five separate species of Pikmin encountered in the Story Mode has a defined, unique function. That's always been a part of the Pikmin series, of course, but I think the mix Nintendo hit upon here is the best yet – they wisely made the decision to leave Pikmin 2's White and Purple breeds out of the main campaign in order to focus on the original trio of Blues, Reds and Yellows and introduce two new varieties, Rock and Winged.

The Rocks are immediately useful for their more powerful initial impact when thrown. Usually, Pikmin only do damage in a fight by clinging onto a targeted foe and repeatedly bashing them with their headstalks. Rock Pikmin don't cling at all – they simply serve as high-damage projectiles on the first toss, then hit the ground and keep ramming themselves into the enemy again and again until it falls. It's great to have them available to open up a wholly different way of approaching battle (and their invulnerability to being crushed is wonderfully useful too).

The Pink, Winged Pikmin also take things in a totally new direction – their ability to grab and carry items back to homebase by flying over obstacles on the ground is invaluable. Nintendo didn't make them all-powerful, though, and the game will punish you for overconfidence if you think you can just deploy an aerial squad and forget about them – there are some nasty traps that will only trip up the Pinks, like spiderwebs that will snag them out of the air. Everything goes back to teamwork, then – you've got to use other Pikmin to clear the way so that the Pinks can do their job.

Control is more precise than ever before, as the MotionPlus tech in modern Wii Remotes allows for specific targeting of tossed Pikmin – it's a great improvement to the ground-locked cursor from the GameCube era. I personally used the Wii Remote + Nunchuk for direct control here, while setting the GamePad just aside and tapping its touch screen to issue indirect commands. You could use just the Pad exclusively if you wanted to, but I wouldn't recommend it. I had a lot more trouble dealing with its all-buttons control scheme.

Which is one of Pikmin 3's very few problems. The game offers Off-TV Play, as many Wii U titles do, but if you're deprived of the direct pointing ability of the Wiimote, your efficiency in fighting and exploring (and your overall fun), are going to suffer. Since it's optional, it's no big knock on the game – though it could be more of a problem in multiplayer.

And then there's the story. For the most part, it's yet another strength of this sequel – introducing a new cast of heroes was a great idea, especially since Captain Olimar and Louie aren't eliminated entirely. (They're a key factor in the plot.) I also loved how the story doesn't disappear beyond the early hours of the game – there are plot events that take place at several points throughout the single-player campaign, keeping you on your toes and mixing things up just when you think you're settled into a regular rhythm.

But I'm a bit disappointed with how it all ends – in that it doesn't. Pikmin 3 introduces the foundational question of "What was the mysterious force that caused Alph, Brittany and Charlie to crash?", but then provides no answer before the credits roll. At first I though the ending might be a false one – Pikmin 2 did something like that. But then I realized that, no, they actually are just leaving this plot thread dangling out there. Is it intentional? To set up a potential Pikmin 4 in the future? Perhaps, but, as I said, that leaves me a bit disappointed. Because it took us nine years for Pikmin 3 to be released, and I'd rather not have to wait another decade before learning the true ending to this tale.

If a cliffhanger ending is the biggest complaint I can come up with, though, Pikmin 3 must have been a pretty sensational adventure, wouldn't you say? I heartily recommend that all Wii U owners buy and play this game, and that non-Wii U owners consider picking up the system just for this experience. It will open your eyes to Nintendo's new HD era, open your heart to the cutest little plant soldiers you've ever seen and split your mind into at least three different pieces to be able to manage it all.

(And that's another reason why I'm a little trepidatious about a future Pikmin 4 – I don't know if my brain could handle being divided again.)
– LUCAS

Wii U PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
EAD GROUP 4 / MONOLITH SOFT

MISSION MODE

Once you've completed Pikmin 3's single-player campaign, there are still two other modes to dive into – either alone or with a friend. Mission Mode gives you time trial tasks as you attempt to gather all the fruit in a contained area as fast as possible, take out as many enemies as you can or re-battle bosses from the story. Can you score a Platinum ranking?

BINGO BATTLES

Finally, there are the Bingo Battles – head-to-head fights between you and a friend, each one of you controlling one captain and your own squad of Pikmin. Victory is achieved by collecting a complete bingo row's worth of fruit or fallen foes, and randomizing elements make easy wins a rarity. The only problem? It's a shame two GamePads can't be used, one for each player.

TAKING PIK-TURES

If you can convince your brain to take a break from being locked into full-on work mode, Pikmin 3 includes a wonderfully creative and stunning diversion – photography! The GamePad becomes your camera as you see through the eyes of Alph, Brittany or Charlie and physically move the controller left, right, up and down to frame up your shots. The detail that shines through from the resulting images is remarkable – just look at the reflections upon reflections captured in the image above (by NeoGAF user Nocturnowl). The vast majority of the game is played with the viewpoint pulled back, set wide and away from the action so that you're better able to keep track of your three heroes and dozens of captains. But Nintendo cut no corners on close-up detail – in fact, the camera's even given extra visual effects all its own, like a flash option you can toggle on and off. This is Nintendo in HD, folks. It's gorgeous.

A Reawakening

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER HD

TO GIVE YOU a straightforward and honest confession right up front, I didn't really care for the idea of this beloved Legend of Zelda classic getting the remake treatment when I first heard of its announcement. It came at a time when I was searching for new adventures and experiences on my Wii U – I wasn't in the mood for a revisit to something I'd played before. So I didn't go into The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD with an extremely open mind.

That's an unusual thing for me, but what's more unusual is how quickly this remake won me over, right after booting it up to the first time. And that's not because nostalgia for my first experience with The Wind Waker took hold (though this game contains several of my happiest Nintendo memories), but more so because this newly printed release hits all of the right notes, right away.

If you've never played The Wind Waker before, this is the best way to experience it to the fullest. You take control of Link as he travels across the Great Sea, exploring various islands – each with its own special inhabitants full of unique, quirky character traits. To get to these islands, Link partners with a talking boat – he calls himself the King of Red Lions, and he tells Link that Ganon, the ancient evil, has returned and is once again wreaking havoc in the world.

Stopping him means Link must seek out and explore dungeons to find and collect the Pearls of the Goddesses – proving that he's worthy to wield the power to defeat Ganon.

The gameplay in The Wind Waker HD is mostly unchanged from the original adventure, with Link traveling on foot and on the boat across the ocean. While in dungeons or on larger islands, we see our hero trying to solve puzzles, collect items and defeat various foes in combat. Dungeons always end with a climactic showdown with a boss, which always makes the travel totally worth it.

Next to the usual sword-and-shield gameplay, Link also makes use of a variety of other tools, like bombs and a grappling hook. The interesting detail in item usage is that their animations have been shortened for this remake, which makes Link's overall progress much snappier.

The Wii U GamePad helps to refine item usage even further, as it has some neat functionality to make Link's tools much more accessible. On the touch screen, you can easily drag items and assign them to the Pad's various buttons, all while not stopping the regular course of gameplay. You'll have easy access to your maps and sea charts on the Pad screen too, which makes finding your way across the world a breeze. And, if you're using items that require a lot of precision, you can now aim with the GamePad's gyroscope – that makes control faster and easier for a few critical battles. (You can still use the sticks too, of course.)

Just like many other popular Wii U titles, The Wind Waker HD is fully playable Off-TV, and it works mostly well – the only real problem I have with it is that there's no option to overlay a map on the screen while you're in this optional TV-free mode.

MESSAGES IN A BOTTLE

Bringing The Wind Waker from GameCube to Wii U was bound to result in a few discrepancies in feature set, but we were shocked to see the old Tingle Tuner item get the axe – it was what allowed a second player to hook up a Game Boy Advance and play along on a second screen back in 2002, and the Wii U GamePad seems like it would have been the perfect substitute. Instead, the Tuner is now replaced with the Tingle Bottle, which lets you send messages to the game's Miiverse community. You'll also be able to find bottles from other players, as they'll populate the beaches in your game.

TAKING A CLOSER LOOK

The Wind Waker looked great back in the GameCube era, and was set apart from other adventures of that era by its whimsical cel-shaded style. That look was controversial over a decade ago, but it's proven to have held up wonderfully well over time. Now in HD, The Wind Waker is silky smooth and can be enjoyed at a full 1080p resolution. The draw distance is miles better than before, allowing you to see islands from much further away. Particle effects and lighting are also better represented, giving everything a fresher look. The game looks phenomenal! If this is what a Nintendo HD remake looks like, we're hoping for more!

SMOOTHER SAILING

Sailing across the Great Sea is a huge part of the Wind Waker experience, and it's in these moments when The Wind Waker HD's gameplay adjustments shine through. Your regular sailing motions are quicker than before, and the introduction of the new Swift Sail item – which Link can purchase at the Auction House in the game – makes it possible to cut through the water in any direction. As long as the A Button is held, the King of Red Lions' speed will stay locked at maximum, regardless of the current wind direction. (The Wii U's superior load times make it all possible.)

FIXING THE FETCH QUEST

One of the most irritating sequences in the original version of The Wind Waker was its Triforce fetch quest – an hours-long, laborious chore that was a major pain to fully complete. You first had to find eight different Triforce Treasure Charts. Then you had to bring each one to Tingle for examination. Then you had to sail to the eight different locations they pointed to and dredge up one little fraction of the overall golden triangle from the sea floor. It was drudgery! The Wind Waker HD, thankfully, speeds up this part of Link's adventure. The number of charts you now have to find is reduced to three, and the rest of them will lead you directly to a chest with a piece of the Triforce in it – so while the fetch quest isn't gone, it is much more streamlined. It was a much needed change.

It's irritating to have to break from the action entirely to flash up the map, as it interrupts the flow more than the original.

Another thing I'm not quite sure about is using the Wind Waker itself. Once again, the animations are shorter here than in the GameCube original – but getting your timing right with this magical baton is not always easy. There's a new option to use the touch screen on the GamePad for these sequences, but honestly that just makes it worse.

Despite these minor gripes, The Wind Waker HD has become a much quicker and more fun game overall. Sailing speed is improved, as just a few hours into starting a new quest, it's possible to find the new Swift Sail item – it always keeps itself full of wind regardless of which direction you steer, and that makes traveling across the ocean much faster. Other interesting, pace-quickening tweaks include the fact that you can now carry 500 rupees right from the start, that there are even more treasure charts and that most missions have been adjusted for added speed, too.

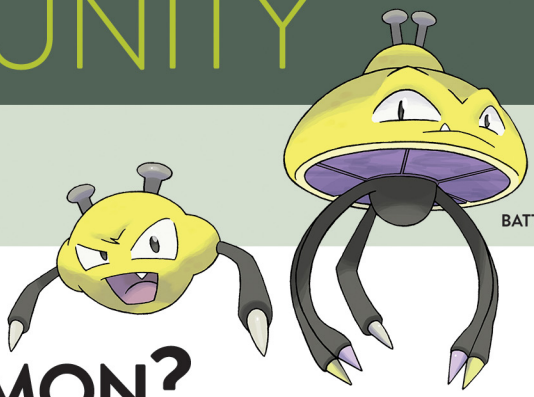
Finally, for returning players who may be up for a tougher challenge, there's Hero Mode – in it, you'll never find Hearts anywhere, so restoring health is a rarity. That feature's available right from the get-go, which is certainly a big plus.

The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker HD is a rare remake of a game that is actually worth rediscovering. It feels like it hasn't been that long since the original, yet everything feels so nostalgic in this second run. It's tighter and faster-paced than the original experience, with upgrades that benefit the quest at every step – with a few minor mistakes along the way, granted. But even with those few errors, players new and old will have nothing to lose by diving back into this Great Sea.

– DAAN

9.0

Wii U PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO EAD



BATTRUS & CLAUSTIC

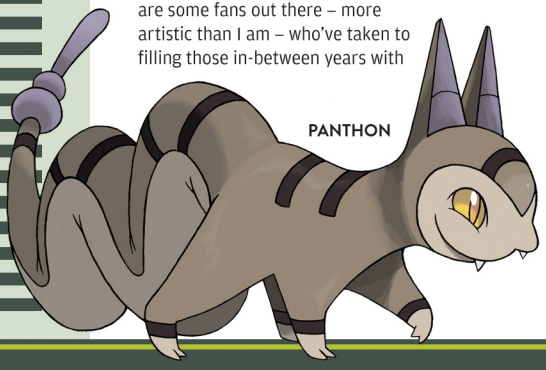
FAKEMON

WHO'S *THAT* POKÉMON?

An artistic fan of the monster-catching franchise adds his own creatures to the cast.

I'M A POKÉMON fan for many different reasons, but I think the part I like the best about playing each new generation is that "What the heck is that?" moment when a totally unexpected, previously unknown creature pops up on the screen. I love seeing the wild variety of different monster designs that Game Freak's artists continue to come up with, sequel after sequel, and it's always a little sad to me when I get to the end of each new game and the realization sets in that I'll have to wait several years before getting to see more totally new Pokémon creations.

Or do I? It turns out I'm not alone in my appreciation of great Pocket Monster design, and there are some fans out there – more artistic than I am – who've taken to filling those in-between years with new Pokémon designs of the own. These "Fakemon," as they've come to be called, aren't official creatures that you'll find in Nintendo's games – but many of them are good enough to be.



PANTHON

I got in touch with one of my favorite Fakemon artists, Josh Harrison, to learn more about what goes into creating these Poké-inspired creatures.

NF: How long have you been drawing? What motivated you to take up that pen/pencil/crayon for the first time?

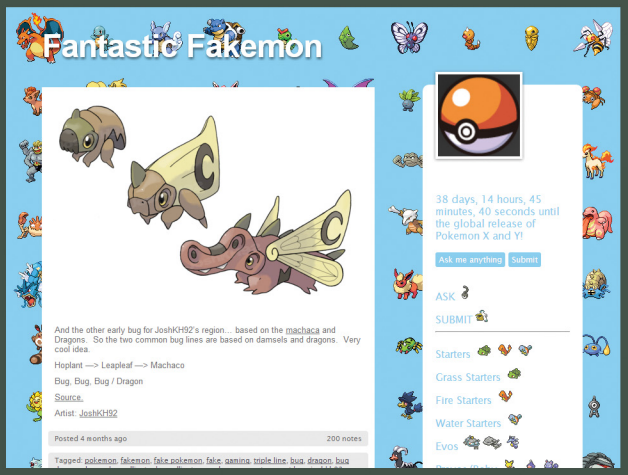
JOSH HARRISON: I get asked this question a lot, so you'd think I'd have a sculpted answer, but the honest one would be I can't remember. There hasn't been a defining moment when I've picked up a pencil and the angelic music has started to play. Drawing is something I've just always done, from a really young age – I was an only child for quite a while, so I had to come up with things to do by myself, and I guess art falls into that category. Both my mum and my grandpa were very creative, so that could have influenced me somewhat.

When did Pokémon enter the equation? How were you introduced to the series?

That's an interesting one, as when Pokémon first hit the scene, I wasn't bothered at all. It was one of those things I was aware of, but hadn't really taken the time to look into. I distinctly remember going to look around a store with my grandparents one day and there, laid out on a table were three laminated Pokémon cards – Bulbasaur, Growlithe, and I think a Caterpie. Looking back I think they were probably for display purposes, but I took them thinking they had been abandoned. I kind of knew the power I had in my hands, and that they were a free ticket into the in-thing of the moment, so I started to build a small card collection. I wasn't aware of the inner workings of the franchise, such as stats or battling or any of the technical side for quite some time; I just collected based on what I liked the look of, or in some cases the rarity. I didn't get my first Pokémon game until I was in high school, around age 11 or 12, so I was a late bloomer in many respects. (I still have that laminated Bulbasaur and Growlithe.)

Did you start drawing your own Pokémon creatures from the start, or did the desire to create your own come later?

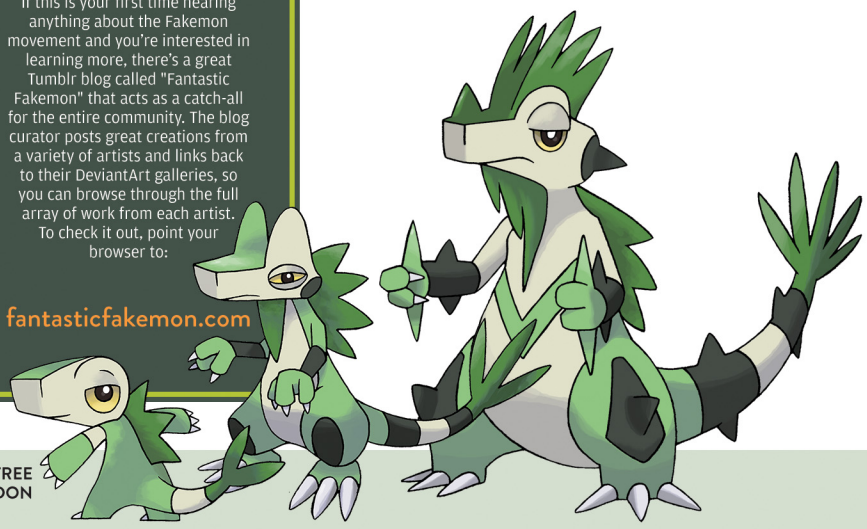
That came later, once I was more aware of the franchise and had a better understanding of what it was about. I started out drawing small scruffy little drawings in biro pen and then cutting them into little squares with the stats on the back (cringe!) They were all different sizes, and I had thousands! At least 10 generations. I used to draw them all the time, with no real filter, so each generation had like 200 Pokémon in it with some really awful designs. It was only when I got older and began to really understand and appreciate what goes into designing a Pokémon, that I started to really fine tune my designs and perfect the craft. I got rid of all those thousands of little squares a while ago, but I do sometimes wish I'd kept them for inspiration, or just a good laugh.



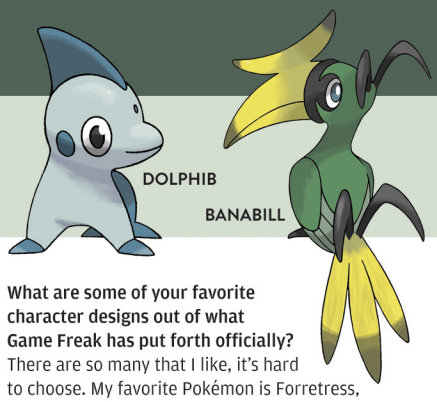
FANTASTIC FAKEMON

If this is your first time hearing anything about the Fakemon movement and you're interested in learning more, there's a great Tumblr blog called "Fantastic Fakemon" that acts as a catch-all for the entire community. The blog curator posts great creations from a variety of artists and links back to their DeviantArt galleries, so you can browse through the full array of work from each artist. To check it out, point your browser to:

fantasticfakemon.com

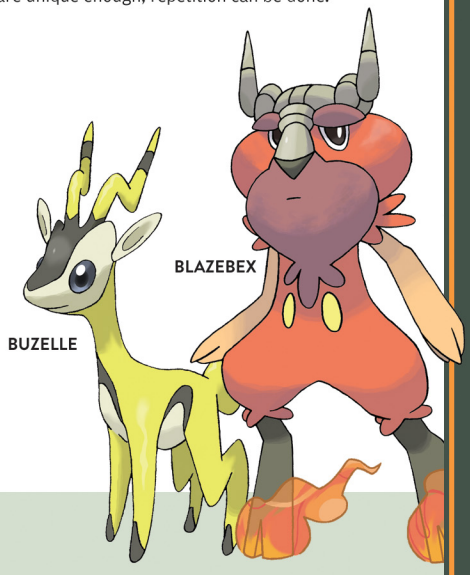


TWIGWANA, MONITREE & GOANADON



What are some of your favorite character designs out of what Game Freak has put forth officially?
There are so many that I like, it's hard to choose. My favorite Pokémon is Forretress, mainly because it's so obscure – it doesn't particularly look like anything from the real world. I also have a soft spot for Water-type Pokémon, particularly fish-based designs. (I'm a bit of a fish fanatic outside of Pokémon, simply because they're so diverse – I think I could fill an entire region just with fish-based Pokémon.) The Pokémon franchise also sparked my interest in Japanese folklore and mythology – a common inspiration behind their designs (e.g. Froslass/Mawile/Drowzee). It's a particularly interesting challenge to try to materialize a myth, soaking up what you can from the backstory and then trying to give it an identity. I get a kick when Game Freak's artists do something really clever with their designs. Take Honedge – the new sword Pokémon – and the way the contours of its blade show through the holes in its sheath to make a face. Or look at how Cofagrigus' headdress slides together so perfectly – it really shows that they take great care and put a lot of effort into their designs, which is something I try to mirror.

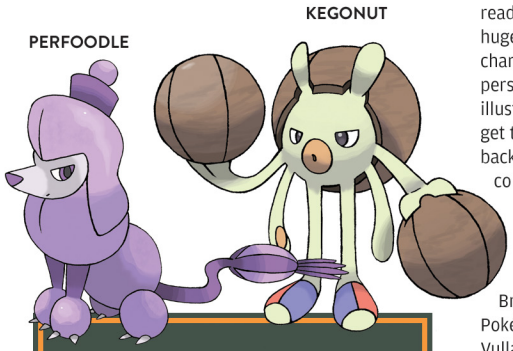
When creating your own monsters, are you inspired by previous Pokemon, or do you try to cover new territory every time?
A bit of both really. It would be foolish to say I'm not inspired by the real thing, since they are what started my designs in the first place. If I'm not directly influenced by their designs, I'll be inspired by certain patterns or demographics that they follow. When it comes to concepts I strive for originality, sure I might design a dog or cat Pokémon, but I try to avoid duplicating anything that is out there officially. Having said that, Game Freak's team has created two separate lines of dream-eating tapir Pokémon, which is a pretty specific concept to repeat. It just shows that if the designs are unique enough, repetition can be done.



SNOUTI

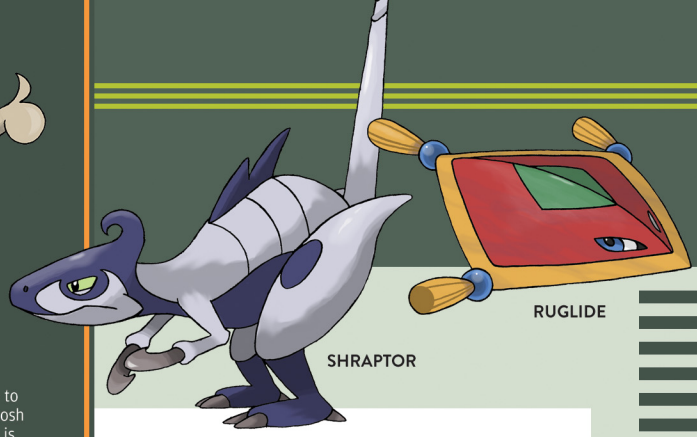
NF Magazine is pleased to be able to debut two all-new creations from Josh exclusively in our pages! The first is Snouti, a monster Josh describes as being his equivalent for that common Normal-type mammal that always pops up in each Pokémon games' earliest areas, like Bidoof, Zigzagoon or Rattata. Based on Mexican coatis, Snouti has a tail shaped like a thumbs-up to be able to communicate with its pack that all is well. If there's trouble, though, the "thumb" curls down.

How do you come up with your ideas? Some of your monsters' type combinations and themes are strikingly clever. What's your secret?
Thank you! That all depends, really. Sometimes I might start off with an animal/concept that I want to base a Pokémon off, other times it might be a unique type combination. I've even come up with designs based around a Pokémon's name. As I said earlier, originality is something I aim for with my designs – I try to pick things that haven't been done before so that my work stands out. When someone says, "that's really clever" or, "your designs are so original," I get a little buzz because I know I've done something right.



BLOMOLEN

The final evolution of Josh's pinwheel Pokémon Butturn and Churbine, Blomolen is a Grass/Electric-type based on Dutch windmills. Josh says it was a challenge to characterize a building effectively, as they're naturally immobile – but Blomolen would have unique mobility, in that it would be able to spin its cap around to best catch the wind blowing from any direction. Want to see the earlier forms? Hit up Josh's DeviantArt gallery!

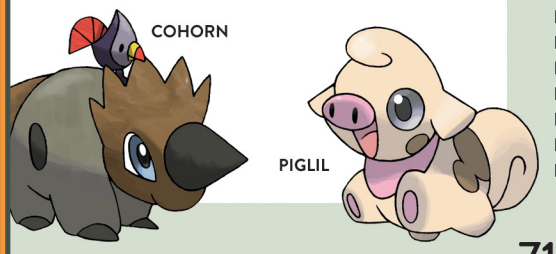


You're in the process of creating an entire region's worth of monsters. Is that a key goal motivating you to continue?
You would think so. I actually have two regions – the one I'm working on currently is my second. The first region was when I first started on DeviantArt – they're all in pencil and a little cringeworthy in places. Once I've finished the current region, I plan to go back and rework my old designs digitally. It takes so long to create new designs though – I'm a true perfectionist, so if I don't get excited about a design, it doesn't make the cut. One thing I set out to do when I started this project was to fill the region with Pokémon that I would catch in the games if they were real. Also, real life has a habit of overtaking things, and with University and work commitments, Fakemon sometimes get put on the back burner. (I think any designer will sympathize with that.)

Lastly, have you applied for a job at Game Freak yet? I could help you track down their human resources person, I'm sure.
Gosh, that is the ultimate dream! I'm not actually sure if it will ever happen, though I'm not quite ready to give up hope yet. It just seems like such a huge maze of a company to get into, and the chances of me coming into contact with the right person seem pretty slim. I'm working on getting an illustration degree at the moment, so if I ever do get that opportunity I'll have some numbers to back me up! I know this is a heavily Japan-based company, with a team of mostly Japanese designers, so it seems unlikely they'd hand out jobs to a Brit (maybe I need to learn Japanese). Having said that, when Pokémon Black and White were being created, they grafted in a British graphic designer to design some of the Pokémon (James Turner, responsible for the Golett, Vullaby and Vanillite families) so I kinda feel like someone else has already taken my place – does lightning really strike the same place twice? (Though if you have that phone number I'd be more than willing to take you up on your offer!)

Our thanks to Josh for his time, answering our questions and allowing us to feature his Fakemon designs. (And for giving me more of those great "What the heck is that?" moments!) – **LUCAS**

joshkh92.deviantart.com



New SUPER MARIO BUSTERS 2

FAN FILMS

WHO YOU GONNA CALL? MARIO!

Incredible Flash animation brings together two spot-on mash-ups of Super Mario Bros. and Ghostbusters.

FOR THOSE WHO have yet to see it, "Super Mario Busters" and its sequel are a pair of loving mash-ups of two of the greatest franchises to come out of the '80s. Of course, we mean none other than Ghostbusters and Super Mario Bros. (Which has a further layer of irony to it when you consider that the former inspired the movie version of the latter at some points during production).

With Halloween just around the corner, along with all the spookiness that entails, it seemed like a perfect time to speak with the creator of these two shorts, James Farr, about what inspired him to create this Flash-animated fusion of plumbers and poltergeists. – **DAVID**

NF: How did you come up with the idea of combining Super Mario Bros. and Ghostbusters?
JAMES FARR: I remember the first time I saw Ghostbusters 2, and getting so excited when Louis mentioned Super Mario (MARE-E-O) Bros. (I was 9.) Add to that, the Statue of Liberty was literally controlled by an NES Advantage. Does that make sense? No. Did it blow my 9-year-old mind? Yes. Ever since then, the two brands (GB and Super Mario) have sort of lived together in my head.

It seems like not a single moment misses an opportunity to mix things up. Was it difficult to come up with any of the cross-references, or did everything come naturally? (Waluigi Peck is a favorite of mine.)
My favorite part is the development stage, where all the possible narrative overlaps are uncovered and evaluated. I wouldn't say it's "difficult" to find these, per se, but it sometimes can involve a lot of research. The hardest part, it turns out, is deciding which narrative overlap to choose. Naturally, with such a big and beloved brand like Nintendo, you have a virtually endless pantheon of well-known characters and environments to draw from. So while the ideas can sometimes occur very naturally and organically, settling on the perfect choice is generally the most difficult part.

Why is Sonic included? That seemed to come from out of nowhere.
The short answer is: I thought it was a really fun surprise. The slightly longer answer is: In the original Ghostbusters film, Winston wasn't hired until pretty late in the game, after the rest of the characters had already established their brand. In a similar vein, though Sonic wasn't always a part of the Nintendo family, he was eventually invited to join the team. And I, for one, get a huge kick out of that. Every time I see Mario and Sonic together on screen, my inner 12-year-old is like "Holy cow!"

Ghostbusters 3 has been in the works for quite a while. Any thoughts on maybe adapting Real Ghostbusters episodes? You've also done some other mash-ups, like Dr. Who/Back to the Future; any thoughts on another Nintendo mash-up?
I'm holding out hope for Ghostbusters 3, as the current storyline would make for an amazing amount of narrative overlap. In the meantime, I'm working on four more mashups back to back, combining Nintendo with two other worlds from our collective youth. Can't say what they are yet, but all four should be hitting before the end of the year.

If that wasn't enough for you, here's one other fun fact that brings the two worlds closer together: The Super Mario Bros. Super Show! episode "Slime Busters" features none other than Ernie Hudson (who played Winston Zeddemore in the original movies, but might be better known to younger audiences today as Agent Fowler from Transformers: Prime) playing a paranormal investigator not unlike his character in the films. That DiC created both this cartoon and The Real Ghostbusters and liked to cross over their properties a bit probably didn't hurt matters, either.

youtube.com/user/jamesrfarr

RADICAL, DUDE!
Here's just a quick peek at James' newest Nintendo/pop culture mash-up – visit his YouTube channel to check it out!

THE CROSSING GUARDIAN

A Plaza Appears

The animals make the leap to HD on Wii U.

DURING THE LATEST Nintendo Direct, Satoru Iwata and Isabelle (of New Leaf fame) announced the opening of a brand new place to discuss everything related to Animal Crossing – the Animal Crossing Plaza. Only reachable through your Wii U, it can be downloaded free from the Nintendo eShop right now.

The Plaza itself can best be described as an Animal Crossing version of the WaraWara Plaza, which can be found on the Wii U's home screen. You can see characters from the universe talking it up right, left and center and they each come with their own quirks from the regular game. By clicking on a character, you can view recent posts on the critter and post your own message about them directly from your Wii U GamePad. If you select your Mii however, you can access albums in which you can store photos from your Nintendo 3DS SD card. These Animal Crossing: New Leaf snaps can be used in Miiverse posts, but also can put here safely for later usage.

The Animal Crossing Plaza is a simple yet effective application, mostly if you are already deeply invested in the series. Just leaving your Plaza open at full screen on the television gives you a constant stream of messages and will maybe let you discover brand new animal friends. Of course, just like with the WaraWara Plaza, you can press the Plus Button for a more close and personal look.

The Plaza doesn't do much else though, and that might be a bit saddening for the more casual fan. Personally, I think it would be interesting if more applications tied into Animal Crossing directly, but maybe that goes against the nature of the game. That said, though, it would be nice to always have a calendar at the ready.

At the end of the day, however, this is a free application and there's nothing stopping you from giving it a go.

The characters and lighting in the Plaza are very nice looking, too, and it's easy to put two and two together and surmise that we may just be getting a a glimpse into the future of the Animal Crossing franchise here. We don't know when to expect the next Animal Crossing game, but I would really be fine with it looking just like this. With the changes that New Leaf made, I will patiently wait for actual details on the title, though. I want to see Animal Crossing grow with every piece of hardware, and I'm happy with Nintendo taking their time with the inevitable Wii U sequel. – **DAAN**

CHIKORE DREAM CODE:
3000-0845-9227

THE CROSSING GUARDIAN

Visit the Impossible Town

We go sightseeing in the glitched-out village of Chikore.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, we have a true mystery here in the town named Chikore. This village is unlike any we've ever encountered in New Leaf before – it's so crazy that it's impressive. When you first enter the town, you'll see pear trees and golden roses everywhere. Not too shocking. But then the trip into The Twilight Zone begins! You'll make such odd discoveries as flowers impossibly stuck in the river, somehow surviving in a healthy condition. Even weirder is the waterfall, where it's possible to hop into the water and walk upon it! There are totally submerged Public Works projects, pitfalls everywhere – and that's just the beginning, as we recommend that you ask for a wet suit to discover even more maddening things! – **DAAN**

– **CREDIT TO THE DAILY CHUPON:** HTTP://DAILYCHUPON.TUMBLR.COM

NEXT ISSUE

The end of another calendar year is fast approaching, and that means the holiday season is almost upon us, and *that* means, hopefully, some great opportunities for multiplayer gaming will be heading your way as friends and family gather together to celebrate Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's. The Nintendo Force wants you to get the most out of such occasions, so our next issue will help you pull together the best multiplayer party imaginable! (We'll have some help from conveniently timed new releases like Wii Party U and **Mario Party: Island Tour.**) Don't miss NF Issue #6: Fun for Four (or More)!

IN THE WORKS FOR ISSUE #6:

SUPER MARIO **3D WORLD**

Wii PARTY U

MARIO PARTY: **ISLAND TOUR**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: **A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS**

ASSASSIN'S CREED IV: **BLACK FLAG**

Wii FIT U

Wii SPORTS CLUB

POKÉMON X & Y

SONIC **LOST WORLD**

BATMAN: ARKHAM ORIGINS

KICKSTARTED! MIGHTY NO. 9 & SHANTAE: HALF-GENIE HERO

CALL OF DUTY: **GHOSTS**

TEENAGE MUTANT **NINJA TURTLES**

LEGO MARVEL SUPER HEROES

SCRIBBLENAUTS UNMASKED

AND MUCH **MORE!**

NOVEMBER/ DECEMBER 2013

CHAR

So much of Pokémon is proper strategy. There are 18 different types of monsters now, and to be successful you need to put together a balanced team with attacks that will work effectively against the full range of diverse opponents that will come before you. It's a task that takes careful planning.

And it can be so much fun when you ignore it entirely.

I've never been able to bring myself to cast strategy aside in my playthroughs, but my brother Dan has never had any such trouble – his one tactic for making it through the single-player campaign of pretty much every Pokémon generation has been to take his one Starter monster, train it, train it some more, then keep training it exclusively, paying no attention to catching or training any others along the way until he's left with a single, ridiculously overpowered monstrosity that can take down every opponent in its path alone, with no assistance needed, ever.

It all began 15 years ago with one young Charmander born on his copy of Pokémon Red, a Level 5 pack of pixels and potential that Dan and his trainer, Goku, proceeded to develop into the Kanto Region's most frighteningly funny fighting force. Frightening because of his power – he'd blow past Gym Badge level barriers and start going berserk by disregarding orders, but he'd still win every fight with the random attacks he'd occasionally decide to use. Funny because of what that attack usually ended up being – Scratch. Though Charmeleons and Charizards learn much more powerful attacks as they level up, Dan and Goku decided never to delete that all-purpose damage-dealer, all the way through the end of the quest.

And so it was that a lone, Level 100 Charizard – simply nicknamed "Char" – single-handedly destroyed the Elite Four in Kanto, using only Scratches.

Dan's repeated this same practice since, beginning with a Typhlosion named Coal in Pokémon Gold and carrying the tradition through to every other Fire-type Starter since. But none have every matched the majesty of Char.

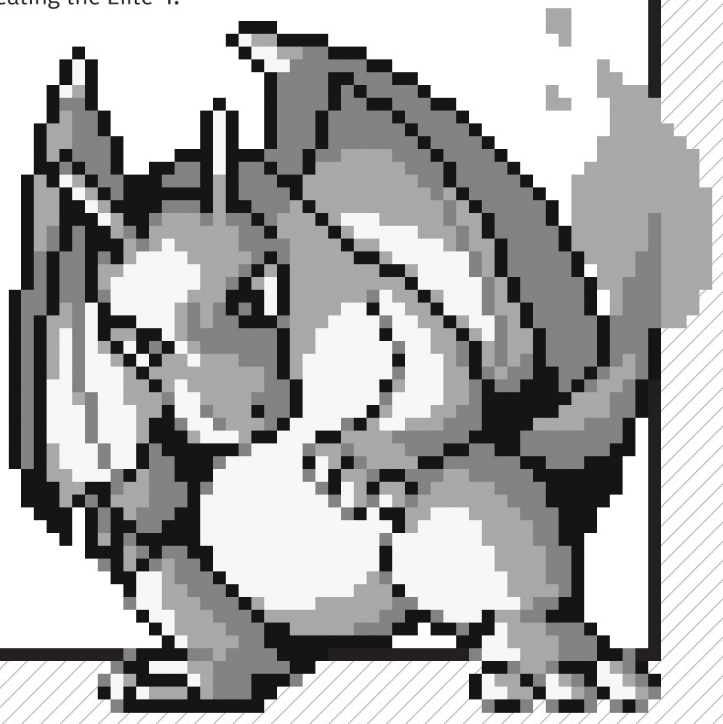
If you're up for a challenge, or simply want to try playing any of the core series of Pokémon games a little bit differently, why don't you try your hand at Char's Challenge? Pick one monster and focus exclusively on training it, ignoring all others you encounter along the way. And don't ever delete its weakest damage-dealing move, either! See if you can make it all the way through to defeating the Elite 4.

If you're successful, let us know about your victory! You could even try it with your own Charmander in the new Pokémon X or Y if you wanted, since Professor Sycamore will be giving away the original Kanto Starters again, early in the quest. You'd even be able to raise your Charmander all the way up to accessing its Mega Evolution! That will be a great achievement for millions of players.

But I'm lucky. I got to see the original Mega Charizard in action, 15 years ago.

Good strategy, Dan.

Lucas M. Thomas



JOIN THE **FORCE** OF NINTENDO FANS

ISSUE #5:
POKÉMON POWER

THE ABC'S OF
POKÉMON X & Y

THEN & NOW:
POKÉMON RPGs

CHARACTER PROFILE:
MEWTWO

RAYMAN
LEGENDS

PIKMIN 3

INTERVIEW:
MANABU YAMANA,
PRESIDENT & CEO
OF GENIUS SONORITY

THE (NON-POKÉMON)
HISTORY OF
GAME FREAK

IT'S NEW TO ME!
EARTHBOUND

THE WONDERFUL
101

KICKSTARTED!

SHANTAE & THE
PIRATE'S CURSE

F-ZERO:
ODE TO THE X CUP

SEPTEMBER/
OCTOBER 2013